No. 709 *Richard Pryce* 50 CENTS

Entered at the Post-Office at New York, as Second-class Mail Matter. Issued Monthly. Subscription Price per Year, 12 Nos., $7.50.

Extra

MISS MAXWELL'S AFFECTIONS

A Novel

BY

RICHARD PRYCE

NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS
SEPTEMBER, 1891

HARPER'S FRANKLIN SQUARE LIBRARY.—LATEST ISSUES.

CENTS.

709. Miss Maxwell's Affections. A Novel. By Richard Pryce 50
708. Judith Trachtenberg. A Novel. By Karl Emil Franzos. Translated by (Mrs.) L. P. and C. T. Lewis 40
707. The Uncle of an Angel, and Other Stories. By Thomas A. Janvier. Illustrated 50
706. Iduna, and Other Stories. By George A. Hibbard 50
705. Romain Kalbris. A Novel. By Hector Malot. Translated by Mary J. Serrano 50
704. A Group of Noble Dames. By Thomas Hardy. Illustrated 75
703. Donald Ross of Heimra. A Novel. By William Black 50
702. St. Katherine's by the Tower. By Walter Besant. Illustrated 60
701. My Danish Sweetheart. A Novel. By W. Clark Russell. Illustrated 60
700. An Old Maid's Love. A Novel. By Maarten Maartens 45
699. April Hopes. A Novel. By W. D. Howells 75
698. Eric Brighteyes. A Novel. By H. Rider Haggard 25
697. The Philadelphian. A Novel. By Louis John Jennings, M.P. 50
696. A Field of Tares. A Novel. By Clo. Graves 40
695. The Golden Goat. A Novel. By Paul Arène. Translated by Mary J. Safford. Illustrated ... 50
694. Annie Kilburn. A Novel. By W. D. Howells .. 75
693. A Hazard of New Fortunes. A Novel. By W. D. Howells. Illustrated 1 00
692. The Missing Heiress. A Novel. By E. Glanville 40
691. The Great Taboo. A Novel. By Grant Allen .. 40
690. A Secret Mission. A Novel 40
689. Her Love and his Life. A Novel. By F. W. Robinson 30
688. Stand Fast, Craig-Royston! A Novel. By William Black. Illustrated 50
687. Marcia. A Novel. By W. E. Norris 40
686. The Wonderful Adventures of Phra the Phœnician. A Novel. By Edwin Lester Arnold. Ill'd 50
685. The Snake's Pass. A Novel. By Bram Stoker. 40
684. The World's Desire. A Novel. By H. Rider Haggard and Andrew Lang 35
683. Kirsteen. A Novel. By Mrs. Oliphant 40
682. My Shipmate Louise: The Romance of a Wreck. By W. Clark Russell 50
681. Children of Gibeon. A Novel. By Walter Besant 50
680. The Courting of Dinah Shadd, and other Stories. By Rudyard Kipling 30
679. The Entailed Hat. A Novel. By George Alfred Townsend ("Gath") 50
678. At an Old Chateau. A Novel. By Katharine S. Macquoid 35
677. Sowing the Wind. A Novel. By Mrs. E. Lynn Linton 25
676. Toxar. A Novel. By the Author of "Thoth," etc 30
675. All Sorts and Conditions of Men. A Novel. By Walter Besant. Illustrated 50
674. Armorel of Lyonesse. A Novel. By Walter Besant. Illustrated 50
673. The Burnt Million. A Novel. By James Payn 25
672. The Shadow of a Dream. A Story. By W. D. Howells 50
671. Beatrice. A Novel. By H. Rider Haggard. Ill'd 30
670. In Her Earliest Youth. A Novel. By Tasma .. 45
669. The Danvers Jewels, and Sir Charles Danvers. A Novel and its Sequel 40
668. Lady Baby. A Novel. By Dorothea Gerard ... 45
667. The Splendid Spur. A Novel. By Q 35
666. Lorna Doone. A Novel. By R. D. Blackmore. Illustrated 40
665. The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard. A Novel. By Anatole France. Translated by Lafcadio Hearn 50

CENTS.

664. Prince Fortunatus. A Novel. By William Black. Illustrated 50
663. Kit and Kitty. A Novel. By R. D. Blackmore. 35
662. An Ocean Tragedy. A Novel. By W. Clark Russell 50
661. A Hazard of New Fortunes. A Novel. By William Dean Howells. Illustrated 75
660. The Bell of St. Paul's. A Novel. By W. Besant 35
659. Marooned. A Novel. By W. Clark Russell ... 25
658. Diana Wentworth. A Novel. By Caroline Fothergill 45
657. Lady Car. A Novel. By Mrs. Oliphant 30
656. Ogeechee Cross-Firings. A Novel. By R. M. Johnston. Illustrated by A. B. Frost 35
655. Margaret Maliphant. A Novel. By Mrs. Comyns Carr 45
654. The County. A Story of Social Life 45
653. Through Love to Life. A Novel. By Gillan Vase 40
652. Uncle Piper of Piper's Hill. A Novel. By Tasma 40
651. Birch Dene. A Novel. By William Westall. 45
650. The Day Will Come. A Novel. By Miss Braddon 50
649. Cleopatra. A Novel. By H. Rider Haggard. Illustrated 25
648. Micah Clarke. A Novel. By A. Conan Doyle. 45
647. Zit and Xoe. A Novel. By the Author of "Lady Bluebeard." 25
646. The Nether World. A Novel. By Geo. Gissing 45
645. Fraternity. A Romance 35
644. The Phantom Future. A Novel. By Henry S. Merriman 35
643. The Country Cousin. A Novel. By Francis Mary Peard 40
642. Lady Bluebeard. A Novel. By the Author of "Zit and Xoe." 40
641. A Dangerous Catspaw. A Novel. By D. Christie Murray and Henry Murray 30
640. French Janet. A Novel. By Sarah Tytler 30
639. A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder. Illustrated 50
638. Toilers of Babylon. A Novel. By B. L. Farjeon 40
637. The Weaker Vessel. A Novel. By D. Christie Murray. Illustrated 50
636. When a Man's Single. A Tale of Literary Life. By J. M. Barrie 35
635. The Peril of Richard Pardon. A Novel. By B. L. Farjeon. Illustrated 30
634. For Faith and Freedom. A Novel. By Walter Besant. Illustrated 50
633. The Countess Eve. A Novel. By J. H. Shorthouse 25
632. A Christmas Rose. A Novel. By R. E. Francillon. 30
631. Yule-Tide Stories and Pictures. 4to. 25
630. The Inner House. A Novel. By Walter Besant 30
629. In Far Lochaber. A Novel. By William Black 40
628. The Mediation of Ralph Hardelot. A Novel. By William Minto 30
627. The Rebel Rose. A Novel 25
626. The Eavesdropper. A Novel. By James Payn 25
625. Through the Long Nights. A Novel. By Mrs. E. Lynn Linton 25
624. The Fatal Three. A Novel. By M. E. Braddon 30
623. The Mystery of Mirbridge. A Novel. By James Payn. Illustrated 50
622. The Strange Adventures of a House-Boat. A Novel. By William Black. Illustrated 50
621. Wessex Tales. By Thomas Hardy 35
620. Joyce. A Novel. By Mrs. Oliphant 35
619. The Life of William I., Emperor of Germany and King of Prussia. 4to. Illustrated 10
618. Herr Paulus. A Novel. By Walter Besant 35
617. Only a Coral Girl. A Novel. By Gertrude Forde 30

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK.

☞ HARPER & BROTHERS *will send any of the above works by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, Canada, or Mexico, on receipt of the price.*

MISS MAXWELL'S AFFECTIONS

A Novel

BY

RICHARD PRYCE

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
COPYRIGHT
SEP 16 1891
WASHINGTON.

NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS, FRANKLIN SQUARE
1891

PZ3
.P954M

Copyright, 1891, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

All rights reserved.

MISS MAXWELL'S AFFECTIONS.

CHAPTER I.

Lady Julia was only judging from precedent when she supposed that the next face Miss Maxwell saw would cure her of her unfortunate attachment to France Woodford.

She was scarcely to blame if she thought that her niece took her conquests lightly. Miss Maxwell had been attracted by each in turn of the four men who had proposed for her hand during the two years that she had been under Lady Julia's wing at Eastwood. In the first instance she had dallied, uncertain as a bird or a butterfly; but in the end her refusal had been given with decision and equanimity.

Of the lovers of Gertrude, one has since married and was consoled. He has little bearing upon the story, and he can remain without a name. Another was George Brabant, a neighboring young squire; the third a certain Johnny Harwood, an unencumbered little bachelor, who was desirable in every way.

Before any of these, Gertrude had fancied herself in love with one Robin Wakefield; and it was upon this instance that Lady Julia based her convictions with re-

gard to the nature and strength of Miss Maxwell's affections. The Wakefield episode had begun in the London days when Gertrude was living with an uncle. The end of it, at least, had come under Lady Julia's direct observation, and she drew her conclusions. There was nothing against young Robin, be it understood, but the fact that he had not a penny to call his own. He told Gertrude, of course, that he would never care for any one else; and she said that it was not so serious as all that. At the same time it was quite sufficiently serious, and only the admirable worldly wisdom of her aunt prevented her from binding herself to him by and for what Lady Julia called "one of those hopeless engagements that drag their weary length through years, and leave you in the end with crow's-feet at the eyes and all your prospects gone."

Lady Julia further said:

"You are the prettiest girl in the county. You will find that you can have half the men at your feet for the nod of your head. Don't make a bad match at twenty-three, whatever you may do later."

So poor Robin Wakefield was sent about his business, and he went to India to grow tea and perhaps marry a begum.

It was after that that Lady Julia commenced her county campaign. Gertrude thought just then that she was unhappy for her penniless lover, and she was unresponsive.

"For goodness' sake!" said her aunt, sharply—"for goodness' sake, try and cheer up. You know as well as I do that you don't feel very deeply. It isn't in you, and you are not half as miserable as you pretend."

"I am," said Gertrude, "twice as miserable."

Then Lady Julia took another course. Let us give her credit for a certain insight into character. She looked at her niece for some moments in a contemplative sort of way.

"No," she said, after a pause of long scrutiny; "no, I am sure of it. I am sure I am right. If it suited you I shouldn't mind; but I do not think—I say I do not think—depression becomes your type of face."

Lady Julia began this little speech very slowly, and with the air of a critic who weighs each word. She ended it with a run. Miss Maxwell listened in silence. She would not give her aunt the satisfaction of letting her see her smile; but she went up to her room, and sat down before the glass.

She looked at her face, at her eyes that were brown with a russet tinge like the color of an autumn leaf, at her mouth with the precise red lips and the white teeth. It was a pity not to laugh sometimes, wasn't it? Her head, with the hair that was soft and dry and curly, was very daintily set upon the slender throat. Why carry it so listlessly?

She rose, satisfied that her aunt was right.

Lady Julia smiled to herself, and, like the man on the stile, she continued to smile. But she should have known that one must not argue from the teaching of a single case, nor even sometimes from that of two or three. The inference to be drawn from the instances of Wakefield, of the unnamed man who married and was consoled, of Harwood, of Brabant, and of yet another of whom we shall hear presently, was as misleading as it could be, and perhaps Lady Julia was justified in smil-

ing. The meeting with France Woodford was in this wise:

He was staying at the manor, and his aunt gave a dinner-party to which Lady Julia and Miss Maxwell were invited. It was, perhaps, because he was different from the men whom Gertrude was in the habit of meeting in the county that he interested her at once. His voice attracted her before she saw him at all. He was talking to some one in the inner room when, with Lady Julia, she went into the drawing-room. The sound of a voice unknown to her and with an unusually sweet tone arrested her attention, and she looked round to see the speaker.

He came in presently with young Harwood, and at dinner he sat opposite to her; and several times Miss Maxwell found herself looking in his direction. It was possibly a proof of her interest in him that she remarked that, beyond the casual glances inevitable to his position as her *vis-à-vis*, he only looked steadily at her twice. On each of these two occasions she felt his eyes upon her, and, with the knowledge of her own beauty, Miss Maxwell had a vague sense of surprise that having looked he should not have looked more often. It was as the party sat down and began or continued conversation that she knew that in his survey of the table Woodford paused for some moments at herself; and again, when Mr. Woodford caught Lady Julia's eye, Gertrude was conscious that he looked at her as she passed him with her nose in the air in that attitude that had gained for her in the county her reputation for pride. She knew that his eyes followed her from the room.

The drawing-room was full of the scent of flowers. The window was open, and Mrs. Woodford closed it in a somewhat fussy way that was habitual to her before sitting down beside Lady Julia.

She began to speak of her nephew, and Miss Maxwell did her best to listen. A girl had fastened herself onto her; and Gertrude, in her effort to hear what was said, made her answers somewhat at random.

"Ranching," she heard. "Home for a few months. . . . Hasn't made it pay. . . . Big losses which he couldn't very well afford."

Miss Maxwell saw that her aunt's interest in the young man dwindled at once. Her own did not. She had vague ideas about ranching, gathered in the most part from songs and magazine articles. The background of a life in the West was full of suggestion: days in the saddle; loneliness and vast expanses; friendships between man and man; a sun setting beyond the line of the prairie grass; the lowing of cattle; the shouting of the boys.

She strung these things together in a sentence without a verb, and was nearly satisfied that she knew exactly what everything was like. There were boys, weren't there? You called them cowboys, and they had long whips, and they shouted "Cooee!" (or was that in Australia?). Anyway, it was very interesting.

Miss Maxwell was not even pretending to pay any attention now to the girl who continued to talk to her.

The men came in presently, and France Woodford was introduced to her. He had easy manners, and the frankest eyes she had ever seen. He kept them upon her as he spoke to her, and she knew why he had looked

at her so little at dinner. Miss Maxwell, as an acknowledged beauty, was accustomed to attract a certain notice.

France Woodford was rather above the middle height, and he was strongly and very neatly built. His broad shoulders, and the muscle that stood out in the calf of the leg that was crossed over the other, spoke to the healthiness of his life. This was also confirmed by his ruddy skin and his sound, white teeth. He had a well-proportioned head, with dark-brown hair, which was cleanly parted and brushed off a square forehead. His eyes were gray, and the eyebrows very level. His nose was straight, and the small brown mustache did not hide the sensitive lips.

In every detail France Woodford was well finished. There was not a bit of slovenly work in his composition; his ears were small, and placed with a due regard to that exactness of measurement that gave to his features their balance; his hands were shapely, if brown from work and a Western sun; and his feet and ankles were slender—he had no ugly side.

Miss Maxwell and he talked of nothing in particular, but this did not seem to Miss Maxwell to matter, so long as he was content to sit opposite to her and to let her look at him. She found that she was a year older than he, and, as they were both under twenty-six, this gave her a certain advantage. After they had arrived at the question of ages, they drifted into more intimate acquaintance. He told her something of his life. There were joys in its freedom, and a loneliness and a sense of exile that she could well realize; and there were hardships, too, that she could vaguely guess. Then they neared a stage at which the emotions come into play.

He told her of a friend who had died on the ranch, away from his own people, and Miss Maxwell felt that she could imagine a case in which she could have envied the friend who lay in his Western grave, because he had died holding Woodford's hand, and because his death could bring that look of sullen sorrow into his face.

"And we buried him, poor old Bruff—Broughton his name was, Broughton Essex, and Bruff evolved itself for short. I saw his mother to-day. I had a letter for her from him. My God, how that woman cared for him! I stayed with her for an hour, giving his messages and telling her of all he said. It seems so odd that he should have been the one to die. It might so easily have been myself, for I had the fever first, and there would have been no one to mind—"

"What do you mean?" said Miss Maxwell, "every one who knew you would have cared."

"Like that?" he said, lightly. "There is no one really to care. Bruff would have cared, though—poor Bruff. He was my friend always. Such a good chap he was—the truest friend a man ever had. I wish you could have seen him—"

He broke off with a short laugh.

"Why should I tell you all this? It can't interest you. You scarcely even know me."

"I think I do, though," said Miss Maxwell, "and it does interest me, whether it seems probable or not."

Some one was playing, and the air, one of those waltzes that are played low in the sadder scenes of a modern play, stirred Gertrude's imagination. Incidentally, as she remarked that it was the girl who had talked to her after dinner who was sitting at the piano, it occurred to

Miss Maxwell that perhaps she had been unjust in thinking her tiresome. At this moment she was distinctly contributing to the effect of a conversation. Incidentally, also, Miss Maxwell saw that little Harwood leaned over her as she played. He was one of her own most persistent admirers, and a smile hovered even now about the corners of her mouth as a recollection came to her of having kissed him of her own accord, telling him to be a good boy and not to "bother," when, for the second time, he had proposed to her, and she had refused him. There had come a pause.

"Where does Mrs. Essex—your friend's mother—live?" said Gertrude.

She asked the question, not so much because she wished to know—it never occurred to her then that the man who had died in his far-off land could ever affect her own fate—as because she liked to hear that tone of tenderness that came into Woodford's voice when he spoke of his friend.

"In London—in Grosvenor Place. She seems very rich, but I think she would change places with the veriest beggar-woman to have her son back."

He paused again.

"You must forgive me for being so gloomy, Miss Maxwell. You see, I have been there to-day, and it has brought back the whole thing to me. Here is Lady Julia"

Miss Maxwell supposed her aunt was becoming uneasy.

CHAPTER II.

THE carriage was announced soon after this, and Lady Julia and her niece made their adieus. Woodford went with them to the door. Miss Maxwell carried home the impression he left upon her as he stood on the steps in the moonlight and waved his hand to her as she put up the window.

Lady Julia said:

"Dear me, that was as dull an evening as I ever spent. What a stupid man that was who took me in to dinner—Colonel Blane, Mrs. Woodford's brother. I don't like her champagne; and did you remark how salt the soup was?"

"I never take soup," said Miss Maxwell, "and you could not expect me to confess that I knew anything of champagne, even if I did. I didn't find it dull."

"You looked very well," said Lady Julia, "and that is what is so provoking of you. You always look your best when there is no occasion for it. By-the-way, I wish you wouldn't talk to one man the whole evening. It gives wrong impressions."

"But I liked him," said Miss Maxwell, with candor and to disarm suspicion. "I wish you would ask him to dinner. He amused me."

"You didn't look as if you were talking of anything that was very amusing. You both looked so serious, I thought I had better separate you. He was rather good-looking."

"Yes, I think he was," said Miss Maxwell.

It is so well to be frank sometimes.

"I suppose I must ask him over some day," said Lady Julia. "There is one good thing about you, Gertrude, you will never be in love with any one but yourself."

"That may have its advantages," said Miss Maxwell, and she smiled to herself in the dark.

Lady Julia went to sleep in her corner after that, and her niece sat up wide awake and looked at the hedges and the trees that were white in the moonlight. She thought of France Woodford, and wondered whether the rest of the party had broken up, and whether he had talked to the Miss Ransom he had taken in to dinner as he had talked to her. The horses were trotting briskly; the lamps looked pale in the brightness of the night.

Lady Julia slept comfortably till the carriage turned into the park. Then she woke up a little cross. She said that she was glad to get back to her own house.

A letter for Miss Maxwell was lying on the hall table. She knew the handwriting well, and, to her regret, she was half prepared for the contents, which ran thus:

"Aldershot, 25th July.

"My Dear Miss Maxwell,—We have quite suddenly been ordered to Malta, and, as I have to start in a fortnight, that must plead excuse for me for any precipitancy in this letter. I will come to the point at once. You know quite well that I love you. I as good as told you so the night of your county ball. I have struggled against all this for a hundred reasons, but I find, in the end, that I cannot leave the country without knowing

what one calls one's 'fate.' I am not going to bother you with a long letter. You are not in love with me. I am neither blind enough nor sufficiently conceited to imagine that you are; but I know that you like me, and if you think that you like me well enough to marry me, you will make me one of the happiest men in England. I am not rich, as you know, but I am in a position to keep a wife, and to promise you that, so far as lies in my power, you shall not miss any of the luxuries to which you have been accustomed. I shall await your answer with what patience I can command. I preferred to write rather than to go to you in person, because it will be easier for you to answer me on paper. I should not wish to overpersuade you into what you might regret afterwards. May I remind you of three very happy days last year? I think you were happy in them, too. I shall not ever forget them myself, and I believe, whatever your answer may be, that what began then for me will last always, and I shall care for you to the end. If there is any hope for me, I would rather that you did not write at once; but if not, will you remember that I wait in suspense? Yours, ever devotedly,

"Edward Knutsford."

Miss Maxwell read this letter through. Her maid loitered about the room, and she told her to go to bed. After that, still holding the letter in her hand, she stood at her window for nearly an hour before she began to undress. The warm air blew in, and with it the fragrance of the roses that hung heavily upon the wall below. The moon was over the woods, and the garden was black and white. There were sounds in the country

night that Gertrude heard as her senses became sharpened. A bat flitted by. A rook woke and cawed once from the elms. There was a rustle in the trees when the branches were stirred by the faintest summer breeze, and sometimes Gertrude heard the stealthy movement of an insect under the leaves of the ivy.

Miss Maxwell noted all these things and thought of Edward Knutsford, and of a time when she had said to herself that if he asked her to marry him, she would not say him nay. He begged her to remember three days. She had not forgotten them. A certain humbleness in the tone of his letter touched her. He seemed to take her refusal of him almost for granted, and to ask her only to answer him definitely, that he might know. She thought of a morning's skating with him in the winter; of a long walk on crisp roads; of a dinner-party; of the ball at Parkhurst, when the words that trembled upon his lips had not been spoken. She was interested; she was stirred by what she had read in his face, nothing more; yet if those words had then been spoken.... She interrupted her thought with one of France.

Gertrude always admitted that her aunt read character with very fair, and in some instances remarkable, accuracy; but she knew also that there were sides of her own to which Lady Julia was entirely blind. She knew that one day love might not be for her the slight and passing thing of which her aunt deemed her alone capable. Later, she was able to make allowances for Lady Julia, who judged according to lights which Miss Maxwell herself had done her best to darken.

That the affections did not count for much in the eyes of the mistress of Eastwood she had long discovered; so

the fact that she was not in love with Edward Knutsford would have carried small weight with her aunt if he had been eligible in other respects. Miss Maxwell had often heard Lady Julia congratulate herself upon her success in marrying another niece, Kate Lane, to Lord Beckenham. Lady Beckenham and Gertrude were friends as well as cousins, and Gertrude knew that if ever a wife had good reason for unhappiness that wife was Lady Beckenham.

Lady Julia professed to be of opinion that Lady Beckenham ought to think herself very fortunate. If it had not been for certain diplomacy at Eastwood, Beckenham would never have been brought up to the scratch (Lady Julia was colloquial), and then Kate would have married that little barrister she was so much in love with, and she would now be living in a semidetached stucco neighborhood or the wilds of farther Bayswater.

Miss Maxwell argued that if Kate could have been happy with her little barrister in Camberwell or Kamschatka, why not? As it was, she was miserable with a husband who was not even faithful to her.

Lady Julia was shocked. At Gertrude's age she had not known the meaning of such an expression. Kate was thought a very lucky girl. Besides, what nonsense it was for Gertrude to talk in that way—Gertrude, who cared more for looking smart and being admired than for all the sentiment in the world.

A recollection of all this roused Miss Maxwell's antagonism. She liked Edward Knutsford. She had even a certain tenderness for him, and from her aunt's point of view he was not eligible. She left the window, and pondering deeply she took up her pen to write to him.

She was accustomed to act on her own responsibility. Then once more she remembered Woodford.

Her head rested on her hand, and she played idly with her pen upon the paper. She drew faces and lines and curves and other wanton devices. In the end she wrote and refused. She was conscious of saying in the letter all the usual things. It was hideously stereotyped, she thought, to express her sense of the honor Captain Knutsford had done her, and to regret that she could not marry him. But she ended with very real protestations of eternal friendship.

"I do like you," she wrote; "I have always liked you, and I always shall, but not in such a way as to permit my marrying you. It would not be fair either to you or to myself. Please believe that I shall always think of you as a dear friend, and after this do not drop me altogether." She signed herself his "affectionate Gertrude Maxwell."

Possibly the day before she might have found that she liked him well enough to marry him. She went to sleep thinking of France Woodford.

CHAPTER III.

The sun was pouring into the dining-room when Gertrude came down to breakfast the next morning. It flashed upon the silver kettle which sang merrily over the blue flame of the spirit-lamp, and the surface of every shining object threw forth borrowed rays. The windows were open, and Gertrude went out for a few

minutes upon the terrace. The sun caught her brown hair, and found in it a tinge of burnished copper. She put her hand to her forehead to shade her eyes. A thin blue mist was on the hills, and over the meadows hung the haze of the dew that was being absorbed. The sky had no cloud. It was clear, blue, and infinitely high. Tiny points sparkled like diamonds in the gravel of the terrace. On the steps a snail had left a trail of silver. The air was full of the hum of insect life. Drops of water stood on spiders' webs and in the cups of the flowers.

Lady Julia Maxwell came to the window.

"Come in to breakfast!" she cried.

She had a somewhat metallic voice which carried a long way. Gertrude had walked to the farther end of the terrace. She was picking heliotrope, and she walked slowly back to the dining-room, shaking the dew from the little bunch as she went.

Lady Julia was cross, and complained again of Mrs. Woodford's champagne.

"I knew it would disagree with me," she said.

The answer to this was so very obvious that Gertrude made none, but contented herself with a smile.

A wasp now flew in through the open window and buzzed round the marmalade. Lady Julia tried to kill it, and it very naturally stung her. Gertrude felt inclined to take the part of the wasp, and she tried not to laugh at the expression of injury on her aunt's face. She bound up the smarting hand, and, by way of taking the sufferer's thoughts off herself, she told her of Knutsford's letter.

Lady Julia writhed.

"I know it will swell," she said, "I know it will. What did he write to you about? Betty's hand swelled right up her arm to the shoulder, and she had to carry it in a sling, and had to wear a high dress for weeks. Horrid little beast! and I was only going to kill it with my pocket-handkerchief. Is there any ammonia in the house? The wasp is dead, anyway. Is he still at Aldershot?"

Gertrude shook the questions in this speech free of extraneous matter.

"I dare say there is some ammonia in the house-keeper's room. I will ring and tell Parker to ask. Captain Knutsford is still at Aldershot. He wrote to tell me that his regiment has been ordered abroad, and he starts for Malta next week."

Possibly Lady Julia's hand was really hurting her. She was certainly very cross.

"With how many more of your friends do you keep up a correspondence?" she asked. "Every man who has known you a week seems to think he may write to you. I never wrote to any one but my brothers when I was a girl."

"I am afraid you are in great pain," said Gertrude, with sympathy. She helped herself to some mushrooms to hide her smile, and she buttered a piece of toast. "He wrote to ask me to marry him," she said, presently.

The sting sank into unimportance. The butler answered the bell, and when Miss Maxwell explained to him that her aunt had been stung by a wasp, and told him to ask the house-keeper if she had any ammonia, Lady Julia said that it did not matter. Parker with-

drew, and Gertrude found herself smiling again as she went on with her breakfast.

"Dear me, child, what chances you have!" said Lady Julia, with interest; "I do not mean that this is such a very good catch. But how well you go down! It is evidently only a question of your being seen. I think, if nothing happens before next year, I must give you a season in town. It would be an awful exertion, but I really think it would be worth while. What it is to have a good appearance!"

"I hope it isn't only my appearance," said Gertrude. She was pleased though, for, after all, your appearance is the only thing in which you can have no hand. The rest you can do for yourself. "You can make yourself good," she was thinking; "you can never make yourself pretty, speaking generally."

"You mustn't throw yourself away on Captain Knutsford," continued Lady Julia, helping herself to coffee, and forgetting that her hand was quite disabled; "I don't think he would do at all. No, Gertrude, you must make a really good marriage. There is no reason why you shouldn't. Indeed, there is every reason why you should. And the fact that you are a sufficiently sensible girl not to fall in love on your own account makes it not only possible, but even probable, that you will."

Miss Maxwell had it on the tip of her tongue to say that that was because hitherto she had not met the right man. She might even have added that she would not trust very much to her supposed coldness if— She refrained, however, being wise in her generation, and she went on with her breakfast.

The gardeners had begun to mow the lawn, and the air throbbed with the jerking noise of the machine. The sweetest country scents were in the air that came in through the open window, and the insects kept up a steady humming round the flowers. A butterfly fluttered in and alighted on the table-cloth, where the sun bathed his yellow wings as he opened and closed them.

Gertrude began to make plans for the morning. She would walk to the village, she thought, and post her letter, and then she would go up into the woods. She could fancy how the sun would slant down through the trees and reveal the colors of moss and root and leaf—

Her aunt interrupted her.

"I suppose you will write to him this morning?"

"To whom?" said Gertrude, absently.

"To Captain Knutsford."

"I have written already," was Miss Maxwell's answer, and Lady Julia looked at her for some moments in contemplative silence.

"You are wonderfully cool, Gertrude," she said then; "nothing seems to ruffle you. I believe if the world came to an end you would be found quite neat and unmoved in your tailor-made dress, looking quite pretty and quite well-bred. I half wonder whether you are really as impassive as you seem. You appear to have shut all trouble out of your life. If it were not that it would upset all my plans for you, I think I should like to see a little more heart. You pretended to be very unhappy about young Wakefield—you weren't a bit, were you?"

"I thought I was," said Miss Maxwell, smiling.

"But you weren't," persisted Lady Julia.

Miss Maxwell could scarcely have said why she thought of France Woodford at that moment, but she did think of him, and she heard again the voice that had spoken of the friend who died.

"I know now that I was not," she said.

Here let me say that Gertrude's training was scarcely such as to have conduced to any display of feelings, even if they existed. Her worldly wisdom she had gotten as a sort of a protection. Miss Maxwell and her brother Henry had comfortable little incomes of their own, but since their childhood they had been practically alone. Neither of them could remember father or mother, and they had tossed about the world pretty much at their own sweet wills. It is not very surprising if they had learned some of its teaching. While Henry was at Eton and Oxford, and afterwards amusing himself where and as he thought best, Gertrude had been to schools in England and abroad, and thence to a series of relations. Finally, her aunt, having lost her own daughter, and having married Kate Lane—Gertrude's cousin—to Lord Beckenham and her own satisfaction, offered her a home at Eastwood.

Gertrude had been living dully with an uncle for the previous year in Berkeley Square and monotonous splendor, and she accepted Lady Julia's invitation at once.

The lines she had laid down for herself were those of the average girl (though she may not admit it) who had lived in the world and kept her eyes open. She only wanted to get through life with the least possible amount of pain, and to enjoy herself. Her aims may not have been very noble, but things noble are somewhat out of reach, and so far she had attained her moderate demands.

She had ideals, it is true, but she scarcely expected to see them realized.

Up to a certain point, I say, was Lady Julia right. Beyond that point, which set the limit to her knowledge of her niece, she could not see.

Miss Maxwell had written her letter to Knutsford with no very keen appreciation of the pain she was inflicting. This, you must understand, came not from any modest depreciation of herself or her own value, but from the inability at that time to grasp what love was.

It was later that Gertrude began to understand many things. Her eyes were opened. She had enjoyed her conquests as conquests. She had, in fact, "loved love" as a thing to gain without giving, but then she knew that she could love a lover.

CHAPTER IV.

As soon as breakfast was over, Gertrude started to walk into the village to post her letter. She had stipulated with her aunt when first she took up her abode at Eastwood for the freedom to which she had been so much accustomed. Lady Julia was not of a straight-laced stock, and it suited her admirably to know that her niece considered herself capable of going about alone. For her own part, she seldom went outside the garden without the carriage, and Gertrude would have fared badly in the matter of exercise if she had relied upon her companionship.

The day was surpassingly fair. Later, perhaps, it

would be very hot. The cattle were lying in the shade of the trees. The grasshoppers were singing loudly in the grass, so that the lower air seemed alive with the sound of them. Here and there, where the sun had not yet reached, the dew still lay on leaf and blade. The hills were now more deeply blue.

As Miss Maxwell turned out of the park gates a dog-cart passed her. The driver turned round, raised his hat and pulled up.

She recognized George Brabant.

If there had been time she would have gone into the lodge to avoid him, but short of cutting him dead there was no choice but to go on.

In a quick glance at Brabant two things would strike you—a certain dominating expression suggestive of cruelty; and the restlessness of his keen eyes.

Gertrude, after the first fancy consequent upon her conquest had worn off, regarded him with something approaching to aversion.

Like every other girl she had dabbled in the Buddhism-and-water, which, in a thin stream, has been dribbling through the literature of the day. Then there had been a time when she had had leanings towards such cheap theosophy as she had drawn from the pages of the magazines and reviews, and, though the subject had now lost its very passing interest for her, occasionally certain dogmas and doctrines recurred to her. She never saw Brabant without remembering that she had learned, in those days, that the body was the only shape the soul of its owner could take. Given the face of George Brabant, she did not think that the man could have been either reliable, disciplined, or moral. He was still not ugly.

Gertrude was nothing if not broad in her views. The world as a school teaches a certain wideness and leniency, and as soon as the occult had lost its interest for her she had developed a strong belief in heredity. That we have very little to do with ourselves was for the time being her creed, and that we are pretty much what our fathers and theirs have made us. So, while she believed that there was little that was lawless of which George Brabant might not be capable, she thought that his disposition was more his misfortune than his fault. His keen and restless eyes had an attraction of their own.

"Keep still, you brute," he said, addressing the mare, who showed signs of a wish to proceed on her way. "Why didn't you go into the lodge?" he said to Gertrude, looking not at her but across into the park. "I saw you had half a mind to; that was why I stopped. I am unamiable, you know. You have told me so yourself. Well, I have come back, Miss Maxwell. You don't seem very glad to see me."

"Do stop flicking that poor beast," said Gertrude; "she would stand still enough if you would only let her alone. If you are at all in a better mood than when you went away I am glad to see you."

George Brabant turned his restless eyes upon her. They were very light in color.

"I haven't much to make me," he said.

Miss Maxwell did not answer this at once. She patted the mare, which he continued to flick with his whip. He let the lash reach nearer and nearer to her hand, and he watched it with a sensual interest and the absorption of an angler throwing a fly. He would like to see a red

welt on the white flesh of the hand from which she had drawn the glove.

"You are right," said Miss Maxwell at length. "I did think of turning into the lodge."

She gave a sudden cry. The stinging cord had wound itself about her wrist.

"You see what you have done," she said, in a low voice.

By force of will she kept back the tears that started to her eyes. For a few moments she was in horrible pain.

"I don't believe I hit you," said Brabant.

"Believe what you like," said Gertrude; "look at my wrist."

She held up her hand as she spoke, moving back, and then standing beside the cart. He averted his eyes for an instant, then looked as she had bidden him. Quite suddenly he caught her fingers and kissed her wrist. Gertrude withdrew her hand. She looked at the red mark of the lash to which he had pressed his lips. Thence she looked up into his eyes. He saw her start. In a quick optical phantasm she saw across his face the angry red line which was, in fact, upon her own flesh.

The illusion was momentary, but she remembered it. It left, indeed, upon her a more lasting impression than the incident of the whip itself. There was a pause before she spoke, and her lip curved contemptuously. But when she broke the silence it was quite quietly, and without anger:

"You have not an atom of self-control," she said. "How can you expect me to like you?"

He made no answer. His desire was spent in the

kiss, and he was looking at the light on the blue hills. Where there were hollows the shadows seemed purple. A wren hopped from twig to twig in the hedge at hand. Gertrude watched it. She remembered presently that Brabant's road and her own lay in the same direction, and till he was gone she would not move.

"You had better drive on," she said, coldly. "I dare say Mrs. Brown at the lodge and all the little Browns whom I can see behind the curtain, have been quite sufficiently edified by what has passed between us."

George Brabant seemed about to speak. He had put down the whip. He turned from looking at the hills.

"Or shall I go back?" said Gertrude. "One or the other."

He raised his hat in silence and drove on.

Gertrude waited till he was out of sight, and then she continued her walk. The incident had somewhat disturbed her, though she showed little sign of discomposure. She had the temperament that retains an outward calm under more ruffling circumstances. Only perhaps a heightened color spoke materially to the state of her inward being. She tried to recompose her mind to the receptive mood in which she had been regarding the beauties of the day. Her wrist was still smarting fiercely. The skin was not broken, but on and beneath it was a mark that time would not be quick to efface. She was saying to herself that Brabant's conduct was intolerable, and that he was not a gentleman. But she said it more as if she would convince herself than as the result of conviction. Still it satisfied any longing for revenge as long as the actual pain continued.

She directed her steps to the post-office.

Mrs. Peck, the postmistress, claims a few words of description. She had a long ear and a keen eye, and news was not more zealously discussed to the tune of the drawing and drinking of beer at the King's Arms opposite than across the counter over which she presided. To go at all to the shop whereat was executed the postal business of the district meant inevitably to be the recipient of a chronicle of the doings of the neighborhood.

Mrs. Peck had started life in a lodging-house at Peckham Rye. To her pride she went in the village by the name of Mrs. Peck o' Peckham, which, she was wont to observe, was for all the world like Peter Piper, and from which she derived a satisfaction that was out of all proportion to the distinction. Her London origin gave her position.

She was a woman of robust habit, plain, ruddy, good-tempered. Her expression had the ingenuous innocence of a Dutch doll, and her features, more especially when seen in profile, resembled not a little that classical toy. Her dress was black, and calls for no comment; but to supplement her hair, she wore at the back of her head a curious arrangement of black thread, the artlessness of which was almost pathetic.

Mr. Peck was of that unassertive type from which a woman of masculine build so often chooses a husband. He was generally smiling. He advanced his opinions deprecatingly, looked after the telegrams, was very content, and obeyed his wife without question. Gertrude, looking at him, sometimes wondered what he thought of it all. He and his wife were one, but that one was Mrs. Peck; and only at such intervals as the augmen-

tation of a large family exacted was she absent for a short space from the scene of her duties, and even then, from an inner room, she called out instructions to the colorless and happy person who looked up to her as completely metaphorically as he did literally, and whom she owned as her lord. On those occasions when Mrs. Peck was incapacitated from work (and they occurred with surprising regularity), Mr. Peck did his best to collect such items of news as he thought might interest her; at all others she absorbed and emitted on her own account reports of everything that took place.

She was, as Miss Maxwell divined from a certain alertness of attitude, in her most voluble mood on this particular day. Her husband was busy with the savings-bank books, and she herself, having sent out the month-old baby with one of the older children, was at leisure.

"Her ladyship well, miss, I hope? That's right. I see the carriage driving Parkhurst way last night, and I wondered whether there was a party anywhere as I hadn't heard of."

Miss Maxwell confessed to having dined at the Manor.

"Then they must have sent your note by messenger," said Mrs. Peck, with interest. "There hasn't been no Manor letters for Eastwood lately—not till to-day, however. There's going to be another party, judging by the Parkhurst pos'mark. A lot of 'em this morning; one for her ladyship, and one for the Ransoms, and one for Mrs. Mariner, and a lot more. It's tennis, I expect. I can't think however you don't get tired of it—running about in the sun. I shouldn't like to do it meself. You don't seem to burn much, either. The young ladies

at the Vic'rage are perfect sights, I call them, partic'lar Miss Mabel, asking pardon for talking so free. I can't think whatever they'll do when the balls begin in the autumn. Their necks and arms 'll be piebald. Was it stamps you asked for, miss? Shall I put your letter in the box, save you going round?"

She read the direction on the envelope as she spoke.

"Captain Knutsford. That was 'im as come down in the winter."

"For the skating," said Miss Maxwell.

"And I see Mr. Brabant's come 'ome," said Mrs. Peck, as if the one name suggested the other, as probably, to one who knew as much as the postmistress, it did. She looked at Miss Maxwell for comment, and Miss Maxwell said,

"Yes."

"He drove by just now," proceeded Mrs. Peck, "and looks stranger than ever, to my thinkin'. Ah, there's queer blood in that family, miss! I wonder if her ladyship remembers his grandfather? He was an odd gentleman, he was, and there was strange goings-on up at Fenton—things as 'd make your 'air stand on end. I can remember Peck's mother—go on with your work, Peck, I'm not talkin' to you—Peck's mother telling me about Mrs. Brabant—that's this young man's gran'mar. They say she died of fright—nothink else but 'im lookin' at her with them white eyes. Peck's mother, she was house-keeper there, and Mr. Brabant he'd used just to look and look at his wife. She got thinner and thinner. She seemed just to waste away. Often and often old Mrs. Peck's told me how of a evening he'd just sit and look at the poor lady, till sometimes she'd cry out

or faint. And when she was alone, she'd used to cry and cry."

"How horrible!" said Miss Maxwell. She was all attention now.

"And after she died," went on Mrs. Peck, "they had to lock him up—he was quite crazy. I sometimes think Mr. George 'e'll go that way, too. Have ever you noticed his eyes, Miss Maxwell? I saw them this morning with the sun a-flarin' in them as he drove by, and they gave me quite a turn."

Gertrude had listened in wonder to what she had heard. How much of George Brabant's nature by her own pet theory of heredity would this explain? She felt a personal resentment against the customer whose entrance interrupted Mrs. Peck's disclosures.

The post-office was also a general shop, and sold an endless variety of things—from papers to peppermint, from cloth to candles. The girl who came in said:

"Mother wants twopenn'orth of mixed biscuits, please; and will you pick 'em out all with sugar on the top."

Mrs. Peck expressed a righteous horror at the unfairness of such a proposition.

"It ain't likely," she said; "I must be just before I'm gen'rous, and I give 'em one with another. You can take 'em that way, or you can leave 'em."

The girl chose to take them, and Gertrude looked on while the order was being executed, hoping that she might hear something more of Brabant's family history. But Mrs. Peck was full of the principles upon which the shop was carried on; and while she shook the dry little biscuits out of their tin into the scale, she continued her discourse.

"It 'd be a pretty way of doing things if I was to chop and choose for each customer. One 'd say, 'I'll 'ave 'em all with currants in;' and another, 'I won't have any of the carraways'—a very pretty way."

She touched the scale as she spoke, and threw in another biscuit, which, proving too heavy, she broke in half, thereby making the weights balance.

Miss Maxwell thought then she had surely finished, but as she opened her paper-bag after blowing into it, and turned the corners down, Mrs. Peck started off again like an automatic machine into which some one has put another coin:

"No, share and share alike; that's my motto, and what my customers will always find me live up to. If you're to be dependable, you must be fair. There you are, my dear, and thank you. You can tell your mother I serve one as I serve another—Liberty, Quality, and Eternity—one the same as another."

Whatever this might mean, and in what way the extraordinary words were applicable to the case in point, was never explained, for, other customers coming in, Miss Maxwell felt that she had no reasonable excuse for waiting.

The crack of a whip on a passing cart reminded her suddenly of the event of the morning, and before her eyes there passed a vision of Brabant's face as she had last seen it, and again it was bisected by a red and angry line.

CHAPTER V.

Miss Maxwell shuddered and left the shop; but as she turned from the threshold, she was conscious with a sense of relief and pleasure of a thought of France Woodford. She felt that she had seen or heard something that had reminded her of him.

She stopped for a few moments, trying to trace her impression to its source, and she looked into the window abstractedly. Postal notices and advices respecting dog and gun licenses shared the space with reels of thread, marbles, writing-paper, and all the cheap variety that comprises the stock-in-trade of the average village shop. She was moving away. It seemed unlikely that Woodford could have spoken to her from that heterogeneous collection. Yet she remembered relevantly, or the reverse, at this moment, that Lady Julia always said of the Pecks' shop that if you wanted a box of pins, you would not be able to get it; but if you wanted ruby velvet, or anything else that was impossible, and that you never did want, you would be sure to find it in the stock. The improbable then was the probable, and even as she prepared to go she was conscious of a repetition of her experience. This time a word was on her lips. She must have read it somewhere in the window. It took her far across the sea, it stirred all the vague and fleeting fancies of the night before, it showed her the lonely grave of the man who had died, and the face of the friend who would always mourn him.

She looked again, and she found that which she was seeking in a piece of music which lay open before her.

"Song of a Ranch," she read, and she ran through a few of the words:

> "Out in the west the shadows are falling,
> The red red sun sets the prairie aflame,
> Mate to his mate is tenderly calling—"

Here the page should have been turned over, and Miss Maxwell was brought to a stand-still, as one's passage is checked in a blind street. The simile, indeed, presented itself to her, and she said "*Impasse!*" below her breath. She read the words again, and in imagination she filled in the details of the scene conjured up before her mind's eye. Her mood was once more receptive. It seemed to her that she was able to realize something of the picture, to look on at the falling Western night as Woodford must have seen it fall a thousand times. She heard sounds faintly as from a distance; she saw an empty sky, in which, when the sunset stains should leave it, the stars would kindle. She thought the grass of the prairie must make music in the lonely twilight. She brought herself back from the New World to the Old with an effort. She re-entered the shop and bought the song, telling Mrs. Peck to send it up to Eastwood. After that she left the village.

The sun was up now, and the whole country was golden with the light. The square tower of the church rose above the trees to the left of the path, and she saw the birds that were circling round the belfry. Through the hedge she could see the wheat in the adjacent field, and the red flame of the poppies, and the blue star of

the cornflowers. A rabbit darted away before her. A lark that she saw as a rising speck in the sky filled the air with its singing.

She left the path presently and went down to the brook. It ran smoothly, and with a soft swirl between its curving banks. The water was so clear that day that Gertrude could see every pebble where the sun struck the bed. She could see fish in the pools, and sometimes the silver flash of their scales. The stream rose up in Lady Julia's woods and flowed thence towards Parkhurst, where it joined the river. It passed through the Manor grounds. Gertrude thought of this now. If ever she knew any one there well enough to write to him, might not a message be floated down upon that running current?

She knelt and dipped her hand into the water. A dragon-fly flew by with gauze wings and prismatic body that shot out strange colors in the sunlight. A bird chased a butterfly. The water gurgled softly—so softly. Gertrude broke a twig and dropped the bits of stick in one by one, giving each a little message, as a nun tells her beads, and watching them as they were carried away. Lady Julia might have doubted the evidence of her senses if she could have heard what Miss Maxwell whispered to the stream.

"Tell him that I am thinking of him—of him and the friend who died. Tell him that I see him plainly, his face, his eyes. Tell him that I think that I shall see him always—"

The sharp bark of a dog came down upon the brook, and the clearness of the water was sullied by mud as clouds obscure the sun. In wringing her wet hand free

of the drops, Gertrude saw the red mark of the lash on her wrist.

The barking was nearer. A couple of collies came bounding towards her with glad sounds of recognition, and almost before Gertrude knew the wild wish that rose within her, it was realized, and France Woodford came round the curve where the trees hid the course of the stream. Each caught sight of the other at the same moment. Gertrude saw the play of expression upon his face as he took in her identity. There was no pretence in the glad surprise. He came towards her quickly.

"Miss Maxwell!" he said.

That was all; but his tone implied something more, and in a moment Gertrude knew that he had been thinking of her. She wondered whether he read a like confession in her face. There was a brief silence after shaking hands. Each waited for the other to speak. In thought Gertrude's acquaintance with him had advanced to a point from which her actual knowledge of him was still far distant, and she felt that she must take her bearings before she moved.

He was the first to speak.

"Where are we?" he said, somewhat abruptly, but with a smile that saved the few words from brusqueness.

The question was so exactly that which Miss Maxwell was asking of herself that for a moment she did not reply. Then she realized that he was speaking of place, and the little laugh that she gave before she answered him was perplexing.

"That is Eastwood," she said — "there, under the near hill."

She looked in a direction as she spoke, and he followed her gaze to where the white top of the house, and the curling smoke from a chimney, were visible over the trees. She looked back, and he looked back too. It was like coming from the past to the present, and Gertrude's case stood as before.

"Then I am trespassing?" said Woodford.

Gertrude nodded, and he laughed.

In his rough gray suit and his leggings, and with the sun in his eyes and glistening on his teeth, he looked the embodiment of health and vigorous manhood.

Miss Maxwell was gradually striking a balance for herself. As yet, since the preceding evening, the acquaintance seemed to have gone backward. She was wishing for the more serious mood in which she had last seen him. Then a sudden friendship had seemed imminent. Was it only the hour, the music, and the other conditions of the meeting that had seemed to bridge the gulf between them? Curiously, it was by the lightest jesting that the consummation she desired came about.

"Aunt Julia and I do not always prosecute," she said.

"I would risk that," he answered; "some things prove worth a penalty, and this walk is one of them."

"You value your exercise—?"

"This walk and this day."

"Oh, you are trying to make a pretty speech?"

He laughed again.

"I wish you had been as glad to see me as I was to see you," he said.

The dogs were panting after their run, and they stretched themselves on the grass. Two red tongues protruded.

"Perhaps I was," said Gertrude, "but you ought not to make me say so."

The shadows of some rooks flapped by on the grass. The shapes were distorted, and Gertrude looked up to see what it was that was passing.

"I was wishing to see you," said France, after a pause. "It seemed to me curious last night after you had gone that I should have talked to you as I did—about poor old Bruff, I mean. You see I was full of him, but that was no reason for boring you with accounts of a man you had never seen."

"You didn't bore me," said Gertrude, quickly, "you know that you didn't. I liked to hear what you said, and I felt almost as if I had known him—as I got to know you. I have thought of him a great deal to-day. You didn't bore me."

"You didn't seem bored," said Woodford, "but that was surprising."

Gertrude looked at his face and wondered many things. She did not speak for a few moments, and the swirl of the brook and the chirping of the grasshoppers filled the silence. Then she said again:

"I have thought of him a great deal to-day. I think it ought to comfort his mother to know that he was not alone. He had you with him, and I think that you could be very tender to your friend."

"He was everything to me," said Woodford.

A rat splashed in the water, and the dogs sprang up and darted off in wild pursuit.

"I miss him every hour of the day," he added.

Something in the sympathy with which Gertrude was regarding him struck him forcibly.

"I believe that you could be a stanch friend," he said; "am I right?"

He looked at her steadily, and her eyes met his.

"I think you are right."

He seemed uncertain about something that rose to his lips. Her frankness reassured him.

"Do you know what they say of you?" he said.

"No," answered she, "and I do not think I much mind. But I should like to hear what has been said of me to you."

"I have been told, then—am I to tell you?"

Gertrude nodded.

"I have been told that you have no heart; that every man you meet falls in love with you, and that he is no more to you than the dust under your feet."

"I wonder who told you that?" said Gertrude, slowly. "Supposing it is partly true, what then? I am not claiming the every-man-I-meet part of it. But supposing I have not been able to care for those who have done me the honor of wishing to marry me, what then? Our affections are perhaps just that part of our being which we are least able to control."

"I think that too," said France.

"And are you going to be warned by what you have been told," asked Gertrude, "or are you going to be my friend?"

"Will you let me?" he said.

She nodded, and he saw the sun flash a gleam of copper out of the brown hair. The dogs had lost their rat, and they returned with muddy feet and dripping coats. France Woodford threw his stick, that they might not shake themselves in such close proximity to

Miss Maxwell and himself. They bounded away yelping, and barked at each other as they collided. Presently they came back like oxen yoked together, an end of the stick in each mouth.

"They are dear old dogs," said Woodford, patting them; "they and the stream brought me here. We thought we would explore it, eh, Bruce? I find that it runs from somewhere up there in the woods right to Parkhurst."

"It is the same stream you have in the grounds at the Manor," said Gertrude.

"I know. That's where we found it, eh, Trap? There, down, down; you're wet. And we followed it right up here. Do you know that it flows just as you see it all the way? No water-falls or rocks or anything. I believe a bit of wood would be carried straight down from here to the Manor."

Gertrude looked at him quickly. It seemed almost as if he must have divined the thoughts that had passed through her brain while as yet he had not been in sight. She thought of the little bits of stick that were even now being hurried along, each bearing its unconscious message. Her color deepened ever so little.

"Why should we not try?" he asked, smiling.

"How would you stop it if it got there?" said Gertrude. "It would float on to Parkhurst, where the brook joins the river just before the mill."

"So it would," said France, "unless I could rig up something across the stream—"

One of the dogs thrust a cold nose into his hand.

"No it wouldn't," he cried, joyfully, and Gertrude saw a boyish side of him, that added to his attraction

for her. "There is a grating under the bridge in the drive, don't you remember, just before the stream runs into the pond, which my aunt calls the lake? It would stop there. Let us see, anyway. Look, here's a bit of wood."

He picked up a piece of bark, and began to cut a smooth surface upon it with his penknife.

"What are you doing that for?" asked Gertrude. She watched the movements of his hands, and thence her eyes wandered to his face.

"Well, you see," answered France, "we must identify it. Will you write something on it?"

"It would wash out."

He finished what he was about before looking up.

"Not if you write firmly," he said. "Here is a pencil."

Gertrude took it and the wood from his hand. She pressed heavily on the lead, and the point broke. He cut a fresh one, and she wrote a date—the date of the preceding day—and having written it, she dropped the bit of bark into the stream.

CHAPTER VI.

The gong sounded for lunch as Gertrude came down the hill behind the house. Lady Julia, in a mushroom hat and a pair of old gloves, and with a large blue apron tied over her dress, was pottering about the garden. She held a pair of shears, and she snipped off a leaf here and there.

"That you, Gertrude? Come and look at these beds. Did you ever see anything so disgraceful? I don't believe Wilson attends to anything but the hot-houses and his stupid orchids. If he isn't careful, I won't have orchids at all. They take all his time, and they aren't worth what I spend on them. The men don't do a thing if he doesn't look after them. I found Lang asleep just now in the tool-house. When Bingham was here, this bed was a blaze of color. Look at the rose under my window. It has all been blown away from the wall. That happened in the storm last week, and there it is still. My hand is very much swollen. Come in to lunch."

Gertrude followed her aunt into the house, drawing off her gloves as she went. She threw them and her hat onto the hall table. Lady Julia was irritable, and grumbled in a good-tempered way about trifles. She mentioned the invitation to the Manor, of which Gertrude had heard from Mrs. Peck, and added that Mrs. Woodford seemed determined to *exploiter* her young man.

She was looking at her niece's wrist, and, being somewhat short-sighted, she saw the mark as a blurred redness.

"Have you been stung, too?" she said, with a coldness that suggested annoyance that another should share her own distinction.

Gertrude nodded.

"Bee or wasp?"

"Neither."

"Oh, only a fly!"

Gertrude explained.

"That all!" said Lady Julia, sweetly. Her niece's wound was less serious than her own. "If you had been

really stung, it would have been the first thing you would have spoken of."

Miss Maxwell smiled. She was thinking that if she had felt constrained to speak of what was uppermost in her thoughts, sting or no sting, she would have had to speak of France Woodford. The talk grew desultory and intersected by the frequent silences that are inevitable between dwellers under a common roof. Gertrude, in one of these, fell to wondering whether France would find her wooden letter caught by the grating under the bridge at the Manor, and whether for him the date which she had written upon it would have any meaning. The bits of stick were dumb, and could give no warmer message. It was a matter of chance whether the piece of bark would travel at all. It might be carried the whole way without a break, or it might be caught upon the first root or branch that slipped into the stream.

Lady Julia commented again upon the delinquencies of her gardener and the paucity of the Eastwood peaches under his rule.

"And I would rather have a good peach than an indifferent orchid any day," she said.

Gertrude attended to her with an effort. Peaches and prejudices mattered little to her just then. How little anything mattered! It was good to be young and to live on the same earth with France Woodford.

The sound of wheels on the drive started Lady Julia to her feet, and to a recollection of the fact that she was at home, that luncheon had been very late, that visitors came early, that she was still wearing the mushroom hat and the blue apron, and she hurried off to clean herself up, as she elegantly expressed it. This she accomplished

in an incredibly short space of time, and Gertrude had barely got off first subjects with the first batch before she came in, handsome, neat, and smart, and with the genial manner of the average well-bred and insincere English woman. She could be cold as an iceberg and stiff as a porcupine quill upon occasion, but she had also the easy knack, when she wished it, of making her visitors think that she was glad to see each one of them personally; and if Mrs. Ransom was allowed to see that Lady Julia was bored with the endless Primrose League of Mrs. Hatton, the wife of the member for Parkhurst, and Mrs. Hatton knew quite well that Mrs. Ransoms' almshouses did not at all interest the mistress of Eastwood, neither of these good people ever guessed the truth with regard to herself.

Mrs. Hatton outset Mrs. Ransom, and she said:

"Yes, the almshouses are very nice, and it is most good and kind of her, isn't it? But don't you get the least little bit—the least little bit in the world—tired of hearing of them?"

Lady Julia smiled indulgently, and Gertrude smiled too, for she had just come back from the door, where Mrs. Ransom, as she got into her dog-cart, had said:

"I mustn't keep you from your aunt, Miss Maxwell, lest the primroses spring up and choke her."

And when at last the wheels of Mrs. Hatton's carriage rolled away down the drive, Lady Julia thanked goodness that "those two dull women" were fairly gone, and wondered "what put it into their stupid heads to call so early?"

Other people arrived, and Gertrude was kept talking. She was indolent, and she interpreted St. Paul's counsel

about being "all things to all men" with an elastic freedom that saved her much trouble socially. She was not untruthful, in its strictest sense.

"But you must never pin me down," she said to little Harwood, who came in at five. "You must never pin me down to anything I may say on those afternoons when Aunt Julia sits up and receives. It really isn't worth while to argue upon matters of no importance, is it?"

She had given him a cordial welcome, and he brought his cup to the open window, where she was sitting half in-doors and half out, with a supreme disregard of draught. He was beginning to believe that when she refused him she had really meant it, and so she was prepared to take him back upon that friendly footing whence his proposals had dislodged him. The fact that he knew France Woodford lent him for the moment a fictitious value. There was only one subject upon which Miss Maxwell wished to talk, and by speaking of the party of the preceding evening she knew that she would arrive at the name she desired to hear.

"But I didn't see much of you," said Harwood.

"Whose fault was that?" asked Miss Maxwell, raising her eyebrows. "You could not tear yourself away from the girl at the piano. I watched you."

Harwood said that Miss Maxwell knew the answer to that, and Miss Maxwell told him that he was prettiest when he smiled and was good, and averted an expression upon his part of his feelings with regard to herself. She was laughing in her sleeve, but what matter?

Lady Julia was talking of her unsatisfactory gardener. Somebody began to give an account of the sins of some

other gardener who had been in the service of a great friend who lived somewhere near an uncle in Devonshire—"a man in whom they had the greatest confidence, and who sold their fruit, their flowers, and their vegetables."

The gardener, the friend, or the uncle? wondered Miss Maxwell, who heard the involved sentence. Lady Julia did not appear to see much connection between the case and her own.

"It isn't dishonesty," she said; "it is orchids and obstinacy."

"But you never can tell about that sort of person," said the visitor, discomfited, and Miss Maxwell looked at Harwood and made a little face.

"That's a thorough good chap," said Harwood, presently, as soon as he had got over the impulse to tell Miss Maxwell for the twentieth time how more than ever he was in love with her—"Woodford, I mean. I was talking to him a lot last night—before dinner, and when you went into the drawing-room. We want a few more men of that build down here. He has never been in this part of the world before, so I told him who every one was. He asked me about you."

Miss Maxwell looked at him quickly.

"About me? Oh!"—(with a long breath)—"and you told him that—that I was wanting in heart and the affections."

Miss Maxwell could look severe.

"I didn't," said Harwood, indignantly. "I shouldn't say anything of the sort even—"

"If you thought it. Then it wasn't you," said Miss Maxwell, and lapsed into silence.

"What wasn't me?"

To this she made no answer. She was running over in her mind such people as might have maligned her. What did it matter? Harwood and his prettiness melted away, and Miss Maxwell saw a man standing by a stream in the sunlight and cutting a piece of wood.

"Don't look as if you didn't see me," said Harwood, in protest. "Is there anything about me to-day that promotes absence of mind in those I meet? You are the second person to-day who has gone off into a brown study, talking to me."

Miss Maxwell asked the other person's name.

"It was Woodford," said Harwood. "I saw him this afternoon. I had been into Parkhurst, and coming back I thought I would cut off a corner by riding through the Manor grounds, and I came upon him down by the brook."

Harwood had the most extraordinary love of detail, and, just as every smallest item in his appearance was carefully considered, so he would pass nothing over as superfluous in telling a story. Miss Maxwell, who so often, when the details were more than usually complete, told him to "skip all that and come to the point," thought with sudden interest that this trick of elaboration was not without its uses.

"What was he doing?"

"Trying to get something out of the water—a bit of bark."

"And did he get it?"

Gertrude wondered the question did not strike him for its triviality.

"Yes, and in that he showed his absence. He said

he wanted it to shy for the dogs—you know, Bruce and Trap; Trap has different colored eyes, and Bruce has a splash of white on his chest. Well, when he got it he forgot all about them, and he carried it down to the gate with him (what are you smiling at?), and though I was explaining to him how to get over to Harwood, I don't believe he heard a word I was saying."

"That was odd," said Miss Maxwell, and she left him in doubt as to whether her laugh was at his expense or Woodford's.

CHAPTER VII.

Gertrude knew that he saw her, though he made no sign. She watched the game and waited, knowing well that when the contest was at an end he would come to her. She did not care whether this was soon or late. It was enough for her that he was there. It seemed to her just then that speech could bring him no nearer to her. A strange happiness possessed her. The very day appeared infected with her joy.

The last stroke told. He caught up his coat and put it on.

"I got your piece of wood," he said, almost at once—"your wooden letter that was not a letter. You had only written the date."

"A date," said Gertrude, "a thing by which to identify the bit of bark—that was what you asked. What else should I have written?"

"A word—a line by which to have cemented our compact."

"That was unnecessary," said Gertrude. "So it really floated down to the Manor!" she added.

"I found it at once," he answered. "It was on the outskirts of that floating raft of reeds and sticks which I have always thought so untidy, and — which has its uses, under the bridge. You wrote the wrong date. Did you know that?"

Gertrude shook her head. The date she had written was that of a day she wished to remember, but she did not explain.

"Oh!" he said, "I thought that last game would never be over. I thought you would be carried off to play on the upper courts."

"I should not have gone," said Gertrude. "You were well matched; besides, I wanted to see Mr. Brabant lose his temper."

"He did, didn't he?" said Woodford, after a moment's pause. Then he laughed. "It was foolish of him, for we only won by a fluke. He made his own partner nervous, and she really plays well."

Gertrude looked over to where Brabant was sullenly standing. A fragile and fair-haired girl was talking to him. She was Miss Ransom, the daughter of the lady with the pet almshouses. Gertrude had no very intimate acquaintance with her, and of late, with a tacit and mutual understanding, the two girls had ceased to exchange even the conventional salutations. It was Miss Ransom whom Woodford had taken into dinner on the night when Gertrude Maxwell first saw him, and in the course of the next few minutes she made a discovery.

When Brabant was out of temper he made small effort to conceal it. He said to Miss Ransom, with impa-

tience, and in a voice loud enough for Gertrude to hear: "What a fuss about a game of tennis, as if it mattered whether one won or not!"

Miss Ransom gave a little laugh and turned away. As she passed the two who had been spectators of the scene she shot a glance of defiance at one of them. There were tears in her eyes.

Between France and Gertrude there was for a few moments an awkward silence. France knew instinctively that she had divined who it was that had spoken of her disparagingly to him. Gertrude herself had guessed Miss Ransom's secret, and the knowledge of her own unwitting share in the play filled her with a sudden uneasiness. In this mood, and against her own inclination, she met Brabant's restless eyes. They were fixed upon her, and she could not avert her own. The incident lasted but a few seconds, but in them Gertrude had time to think of those other eyes that had looked a woman to death, and Woodford saw her shudder. She gave a slight gesture with her hand, and Woodford crossed to her other side, and, passing between her and Brabrant, broke the spell—call it what you like—that had bound her.

Some small change must have come over her face, for Woodford was looking at her curiously, and she was grateful to the wife of the member for Parkhurst who claimed his attention. It seemed to her that in that moment there had been revealed to her something that was attractive and terrible.

Mrs. Hatton's voice cut in through her thought, and by degrees she grasped what was being said. There was to be a concert for the Parkhurst Habitation of the

Primrose League, and Mrs. Hatton had heard that Mr. Woodford played the banjo and sang bee-youtifully—she thus called the word—and would he—might she ask him?

Woodford explained how modest were his attainments.

"Plantation songs and that sort of thing."

"But that is what we want," said Mrs. Hatton, running up the scale and ending in a high note. "We so seldom get anything of the kind down here, do we, Miss Maxwell. Wouldn't it be most good of Mr. Woodford?"

When Gertrude expressed assent, France promised at once. Mrs. Hatton said that she saw that her concert was going to be a success, and went off to beat up performers elsewhere. As she moved away Lady Julia came up.

"How d'ye do Mr. Woodford Gertrude I am going into Parkhurst now," she said, in a breath, and without even a comma, "and I shall return for you in an hour or so."

"Very well, Aunt Julia."

"And if you want any tennis you had better go and play now for I sha'n't wait for you when I come back and if you're not ready you must get the Vicarage girls to give you a lift home."

"Well, we shall see," said Gertrude; "I don't like being hurried."

She understood her aunt thoroughly—down to the absence of punctuation in her sentence. It was perfectly true. Lady Julia did think her niece had been talking to this good-looking young man quite long enough.

He was a gentleman, she readily admitted, and he was well-mannered and all that, but she had other views for Miss Maxwell; and it was just about this time that the name of a certain Wilfrid Graham, of whom more henceforth, began to take a place in her mind and a part in her conversation. Lady Julia was preoccupied as Woodford led her to her carriage, but if she answered him somewhat absently, she smiled very sweetly as she drove off.

Gertrude, meanwhile, forgot Brabant. She went down on to the lawn, and she was unresponsive. Her moods were uncertain, and her manner varied with them. She had a way of repelling the advances of such people as bored her—a trick she had learned in London—with an efficiency that the girls of the Vicarage tried in vain by imitation to attain.

It seemed quite natural that Woodford should join her when he came back. He looked from her to a vacant bench under a tree; and when they were sitting there, he talked to her as she had wished he would talk, telling her bits of his own life at her bidding, and much of the life of the friend that was dead. Sometimes she laughed with him, sometimes her heart ached for him.

The sunlight fell through gaps in the trees in checkered patterns, and laid stress upon the whiteness of her dress. Incidentally he saw how perfect it was in every smallest detail. He noted, too, the beautiful lines of head and throat and bust. She was straight as a young tree, and her waist, that was slender without effort, suggested cruel contrasts as he looked from her to other women who passed. He had never before remarked that his aunt had none.

She looked into his eyes, and she thought how differ-

ent they were in their steadfastness from the eyes of Brabant with their restless passion. She was conscious of a sense of security, and she wondered about such parts of his life as he did not mention to her. Who had loved him, she wondered, and how much, and how had it ended? There were men to whom she would have put this question, but France Woodford was not one of them. To have jested lightly then upon love would have been to step upon ground that was not entirely new to her. Nor did she suppose, or even wish to think, that this ground would have been in any way new to him. But for once, and with a sudden tremor at her heart, she realized that the game might be played in desperate earnest. As this thought struck her, she lowered her eyes almost involuntarily. He took advantage of this to marvel at the delicacy of the texture of her skin. With how precise a hand had nature modelled the face! A sunbeam fell now straight as a ray of lime-light on to her hair. He had not known how full it was of gold—was it of gold, or of copper burnished to its utmost power of shining?

Still, though Gertrude did not look up, it seemed to her that she saw him, so exactly was she conscious of his position. He was sitting with his legs crossed, in what I think I may call the Du Maurier attitude, and his hands were clasped over one knee. He had tilted his straw hat down on to his forehead, and she knew that he was looking at her from under the brim. She even knew the sleeping fire of his pupils dilated in the shade.

Mrs. Ransom passed with Mrs. Woodford, and Gertrude caught the word "almshouse." The element of the commonplace loosed her tongue and her eyes,

But for that day the intimacy between France and Gertrude was to register no higher mark. The irreproachable little Harwood with the Mariner girls from the Vicarage in tow joined them, and the conversation drifted into channels that were safely navigable. Lady Julia's return found her niece ready to accompany her home, but also, by a curious chance, it found her alone with young Woodford. She arrived but five minutes after the departure of the Mariners' trap, to order which little Harwood had accompanied them, and the fact that together the five had made an excursion to the garden to eat peaches went for nothing. Gertrude was conscious that an inference on the part of her aunt was very obvious.

She reminded herself presently that she was her own mistress, and accountable to no one.

Lady Julia said nothing to show that she was thinking over the subject, and on the drive home through the warm air of the late afternoon her talk rolled easily into a good-tempered discussion of her neighbors. It is a significant circumstance, however, that twice there cropped up the name of Wilfrid Graham. Gertrude paid small attention to it; later she heard it with a sense of familiarity.

"He is at Cowes."

"Who is at Cowes?"

Miss Maxwell was not attending.

"Mr. Graham. I heard from Betty St. Pancras this morning. She says his yacht—"

Gertrude was looking at a field where great patches of corn had been laid by a recent storm.

"It wasn't only responsible for blowing the rose down

from your window, you see. Did you taste the peaches at the Manor? They put ours to shame."

Gertrude was not even conscious of having interrupted her aunt. She did not know Mr. Graham. He was only a man to her. The sight of the battered wheat was of far more concern to her than an account of his yacht. Lady Julia thought the mention of the peaches was a deliberate attempt to change the conversation. But she was wrong. Gertrude was only following out a natural train of thought suggested by some remarks that we remember.

Lady Julia returned to the charge.

"He is heir, you know, to Lord St. Pancras."

"Who?" said Gertrude. She had forgotten.

"Mr. Graham," said Lady Julia. But she did not follow up the subject any further.

After dinner that night Gertrude bethought her of the song which lay rolled up in paper upon the hall table, whence she had not yet removed it. She fetched it, and, unrolling it as she went, she crossed the room to the piano. She tried over the notes, and began to sing in a low voice to herself.

Lady Julia, without looking up from her book, said that the air was pretty and suggestive.

"Where did you find it?"

"I got it yesterday in the village."

"Sing it again," said her aunt; "I like it; it is very simple and unpretentious."

Gertrude complied at once. She had a sweet voice, though of no great compass or training, and she had the good sense to make no professions of inability or shyness.

"The air seems to catch the spirit of the words," said Lady Julia. Still she did not look up. As music, the song called for no special attention, nor, indeed, did it aspire to any particular merit.

"That is what I think," said Gertrude, off her guard. "It is suggestive, isn't it? One thinks of a ranch, and —and all that."

Lady Julia laid down her book.

"Ranch!" she said, "Ranch! Where have I been hearing something about a ranch lately?"

She knit her brows.

"Oh yes, I remember," she said, after a pause, and then she looked at Gertrude in a contemplative sort of way that was her habit when she was weighing chances.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lady Julia Maxwell had spoken to Mr. Woodford about dining at Eastwood, otherwise it is doubtful whether she would have run the risk of throwing France once more into her niece's way. She sent out invitations for a small dinner-party early the following week, and Gertrude heard with satisfaction and her quiet smile that Mrs. Woodford had written to accept for herself and her nephew. Lady Julia was full of plans, as her niece might have suspected from her preoccupied air, had she been at this time observant. But Gertrude's thoughts were otherwise employed. Just about this time Lady Julia was surprised to find herself commenting upon what she at first supposed to be a

fresh and more excellent minuteness of detail in the consideration of Gertrude's dress. It was so much a matter of course with her to see her niece carefully clothed, whether sturdily for walking or smartly for social functions and the like, that there must have been some superadded charm to have called for any special comment. Presently Lady Julia found that Gertrude was wearing nothing that she had not worn before—later, that it was her personal beauty that seemed to have borrowed a new radiance. Arrived at this conclusion, Lady Julia sought causes for the effects that had impressed themselves upon her. Gertrude observed her aunt's frequent contemplation of her, but it did not occur to her to question its motive. She was accustomed to be looked at, and it in no way disconcerted her. She was not vain in a vulgar sense, but she was well aware of her good looks. How, indeed, could she be otherwise while mirrors remain truthful, though all men be liars?

Lady Julia's observations had a very real significance. Gertrude's eyes were very light in these summer days. They seemed to have gained in size and depth. Her color was warmer and more fleeting. Her lips were more tender. Her expression was altogether sweeter than her aunt ever remembered so to have seen it.

She watched Gertrude closely. Gertrude was restless, happy, uncertain. She glided into rooms, looked round, and left them. She settled to no definite occupation. In music only did she seem to find an outlet for the joy that was in her. Her piano, which since her residence at Eastwood she had neglected, became dear to her. Her fingers, which at school had been sedu-

lously exercised, refound their cunning, and things that she had played in the old days mechanically took a meaning at her hands that before she had never understood.

"How little I know you," Lady Julia said.

Gertrude was playing Mendelssohn's "Frühlingslied."

"In what way?" she asked.

She looked at her aunt with glowing eyes. Lady Julia was silent for a few moments.

"I have never heard you play as you played that," she said then. "I scarcely even knew that you could play well. I studied a great deal as a girl, Gertrude, and the school of music that you—what shall I say?—affect has always seemed to me somewhat trifling. I have thought it a pity when I have heard you wasting your time over the light waltzes and gavottes of the moment—things that don't live a year. Why, when you have it in you, as I see now that you have, why have you frittered away your talent on things that are not worthy of it or of you?"

"It is a question of mood," said Gertrude.

She knew herself that she had not the perseverance requisite to the true musician. She was too indolent for the drudgery of practice. She also knew that the lighter school of which her aunt spoke was not without charm for her, and she shrank from the education that must forever deprive it of its power of pleasing her. To higher things she might never attain, then let her not cut down the ladder behind her, and be confined to a platform whence she could neither rise nor descend.

But now!—now all laws seemed to have been suspended for her. She could do—what could she not do?

She felt as gods may feel from whom no power is withheld. The buoyancy of her spirit upheld her on a sea of youth and love. Sometimes she laughed aloud. Sometimes she sighed, but the sigh was of happiness. She looked at her own face, and she gloried in its increasing beauty. The world was good and love was good and faith was strong.

And all these things found a reflection in her words and her actions, and to Lady Julia the signs that her niece evinced of the presence of some one element in her life were full of import. Assuredly did she wish Woodford well out of the country, back on his ranch, or, further still, anywhere, in fact, but within a few miles of Eastwood. She fully realized, though she would not admit it, that she had no authority whatever over Gertrude, who might marry the gardener or a chimney-sweep if she chose; but diplomacy can effect much, and after the approaching party Gertrude must see as little of him as possible; and as to that, in the party in question, Lady Julia thought that she had a surprise in store for her niece. If it seemed likely that Gertrude would defy her, then would she herself be wise before the event, and if need be she would deal summarily with that one of the persons concerned who was not related to her.

Lady Julia might be anxious, she was still equally interested. She had, we remember, on the occasion of the refusal of Knutsford, admitted the inconsistency of a wish that Gertrude could show the presence of some feeling. As she saw signs of a fulfilment of her desire, she began to argue that a disappointment would be to the appreciable gain of her niece's character. In her heart of hearts Lady Julia must have known that this

argument was only conceived to allay her anxiety, and that the moulding of a character was as nothing in her eyes compared to an advantageous marriage. She continued to advance it to herself, however. If Miss Maxwell's affections were set upon the young man from the ranch then was a disappointment imminent, and that would be salutary. She talked a good deal of Wilfrid Graham.

What matter—what did anything matter? She had seen France twice in three days. She had met him riding. She had met him driving. They had talked. That was all. That was enough.

There came after that two days of almost incessant rain, and Gertrude's exuberance vanished. She was restless as a caged animal. She wandered about the house, and was drawn to the windows as the point of the needle is drawn to the north. It rained and rained and rained. The shrubs and plants grew draggled and battered, the roses hung their heads swollen with water. Pools formed themselves in the paths, and a long lake skirted the drive. In the beds flowers lay beaten down to the wet earth. A crop of pebbles sprang from the ground. Sometimes a gardener with a sack over his head would run across the lawn on his way from one hot-house to another. Gertrude could fancy how he swore as the rain splashed him, and as circumstances precluded her own feelings from this vent, the presumable fact of his indignant protest almost relieved her. The rain fell in steady lines from a sky gray and low. A steamy mist covered the hills. The light was not strong enough to pierce it, and the day seemed robbed of color. Once Gertrude cloaked herself, and with stout boots and a large umbrella went

out to brave the wet. It seemed to her that her appearance was the signal for a wind to rise. Light things flapped wildly in the hall. Cards rose from the tray and fluttered to the ground like autumn leaves. It was with difficulty that she shut the door behind her. Then as she left the porch her clothes were caught and twisted round her. She could not hold up her umbrella, and her face was lashed with the fierce drops. The streaming world without, the broken flowers, the straggling plants were more depressing than the grayness within. It did not occur to any one till the evening to light fires and make an artificial brightness. Gertrude had not gone a hundred yards before she was wet through. She stepped on the border of turf to avoid a puddle in her path, and the spongy sound of her footfall disgusted her. She returned to the house. She was silent and melancholy for the rest of that day. Lady Julia having once bethought her of a fire revelled in its warmth and comfort, and said that it might rain as long as it liked. It liked till the evening of the following day. Then a pale gleam of sunlight fell warmly from the west. The woods were tinged with faintest gold. Birds sang loudly from the dripping trees. Every leaf glistened in the promise of the return of summer. The mist cleared off the hills, and they caught a thin radiance; and the clouds disappeared with one consent, and left the sky a tender blue. The drops that at the close of the storm had fallen singly and at wide intervals no longer fell at all, as Gertrude once more went out. What a pleasant sound was that of the dripping trees. The smell of the earth was a thing to remember. The pools were palely aflame. Little ripples that danced with the wan-

light skimmed their surfaces. The summer grass was green, and all the leaves had washed away their dust. How loudly the birds were singing. That, from the lilac bush, was the note of a robin. It was sweet, liquid, and intermittent. Gertrude's eyes discovered the singer. The twig on which he sat was marked out by his color. The light fell directly upon his reds and browns. A thrush discoursed his music from some neighboring tree, and a linnet was among the shrubs. Sparrows and other birds of less gifted throats filled the evening with twitterings and chirpings.

Gertrude's spirits rose like quicksilver. She walked down through the park. Here the pale light had freer play. The wet grass glistened like a sheet of ice. The wind had fallen, and the breeze carried the damp scent of the recent rain. At the bend near the lodge gates Gertrude chanced to glance back at the house, and she saw that every window was ablaze. The faint yellow in the west was now slightly tinged with pink. A rosier color lay upon the hills, and the hollows were darkly purple. The rooks, with loud cawings and the rustle of many flapping wings, passed overhead from their work in the fields to the elms behind the house. Gertrude stood and watched them to their homes, and listened to the babel of hoarse tongues that reached her as the birds attained the trees. A blue smoke, telling of damp wood, rose thickly from the chimney of the lodge. From the church-tower was struck the quarter after seven. Gertrude had then half an hour. She would walk in the direction of the village. The wet road ahead of her gleamed like a river. She was gaitered and stoutly shod; she need not pick her steps. The swallows were once

more flying high, and with every minute the west grew pinker, and so less wan and sickly. The glass was rising steadily—so much Gertrude had learned before she left the house—and all the signs of sky and wind and temperature combined to promise a change.

Gertrude's senses seemed alert to note each subtlest work of nature, and the smile of the world after its tears communicated to her a very real joy. She did not try to analyze her feelings. It was enough for her that her depression was past. She found herself wondering what Woodford had done these dismal days. Had he felt caged as she herself? Had he read? And what had he read?

A sound smote upon her ear, and she was surprised to find that it was the roar of the swollen brook. She leaned over the bridge and watched the hurrying water. It was muddy and gray, with sometimes a splash of white where it had struck an unwonted rock in its course, and had bruised itself to foam. She thought how a wooden message would be tossed along to-day upon that rushing tide, how it would be whirled round the bends and danced through the eddying pools. The noise of the water drowned other sounds, and a rider, whose approach would otherwise have been heralded by the dull ring of his horse's hoofs upon the stony road, was close upon her before she suspected his presence. He drew rein suddenly. Gertrude looked up and saw France Woodford.

She gave him her hand.

"I believe we are in the same case," he said.

"In prison, and now free? I have spent these two days in beating myself against the bars. And you?"

"In the billiard-room at the Sceptre at Parkhurst. I was fortunate enough to meet Harwood."

Gertrude was conscious of a feeling of disappointment. The days had passed more tolerably for him than for her. Yet would she not have wished him all possible good? She looked up at him in the wan, yellow light. It was gilding faintly the outline of his ear and his hair and the nap of his felt hat. The gray of his corduroy breeches against the chestnut of the horse pleased Gertrude's sense of color. His seat in the saddle had before now met with her critical approbation.

"Oh, I would like to ride with you, France Woodford!" she was saying to herself. "I would like to ride with you—away, across country, over the brooks and the hedges and ditches to the end of the world, and then—die."

But aloud she only said:

"At Eastwood we might have been snowed up for all that we saw or heard of any one outside our gates. Oh, it was dull! lonely! horrid!"

She caressed his horse with her hand. The movement took with her an indescribable charm. The pale light illumined her. He looked down at her, and as he saw her in the superb pride of her youth and her beauty, his expression became for a moment tender to sadness. He made as if he would have spoken, but he did not speak. He gave a short sigh, and set his teeth grimly. She was not looking at him, but at the horse's glossy neck, on which her hand rested lovingly. If at that moment her eyes had met his, the tide of her fortunes might have been changed; but they did not.

"Oh," she said, "another day of my prison, and I

should have died! I read, I played; I read again, I played again. I tried to go out—I don't mind bad weather—but I was beaten back. Rain I like—soft rain that kisses one, or fierce rain that beats upon one's face and stings it. And I like wind, too. I like to be buffetted and hustled. But rain and wind together—!"

"I had to fight my way to Parkhurst," said France.

"And I fought the hours in-doors," said Gertrude, smiling, but with her brows knit. "I longed for the sight of a human being as one longs sometimes for a sight of—"

"Of the sea," said France.

"How did you know?"

The church clock struck the half-hour. Only a few minutes remained before she must return to the house. The sun showed less than a quarter of his disc behind the horizon.

"Tennyson knew when he wrote 'Break!'" said France.

Gertrude shivered—". . . the touch of a vanished hand . . . the sound of a voice that is still . . ."—the shadow of the dead friend had fallen between them.

"There were days," said France, slowly, "when I used to read those lines—for comfort, as other people read the Bible."

The horse pawed the ground. Gertrude looked at the woods and saw the last gleam of palest gold leave them. They seemed then to change from green to brown.

"Do I hate the friend or love him?" said Gertrude to herself. "Does he separate us or bring us together?"

The sun was gone, and the sky, that had attained no

very brilliant coloring, began rapidly to change. The pink melted from the hills, and the yellow of the west became paler. At no point did it exceed in tone the color of a primrose.

She touched the hand that held the reins gently.

"Look onward," she said. "Life is good."

Her eyes had a tremulous brightness.

"Life is good," he answered.

The horse grew restive, and made a pretence of alarm at the turmoil of the brook.

"I must go," said Gertrude.

"Oh no," he said; "not yet. Don't go. Look at the brook."

"And to look at the brook is to stay," said Gertrude. They laughed together—heartily, merrily, as if just now there had been no thought of the dead. "I have looked," said Gertrude, "and yet I must go."

But she did not go.

"Isn't it odd?" she said, and he laughed, and she laughed at nothing.

"This is what it is to be young," she said then. "Isn't it good to be young? Isn't life good? Oh, let us pray that there will never come a day when we shall not be able to laugh."

He sought words to detain her. He dreaded the moment when she must go. He would like to gaze at her laughing thus forever. She looked an incarnation of mirth. She should be painted with vine-leaves in her hair and garlands about her arms and bust, and holding a golden cup aloft.

"You are like Romney's 'Lady Hamilton,'" he said.

She shook her head.

"I am like Gertrude Maxwell," she said.

"You are right. Gertrude Maxwell, and Gertrude Maxwell only."

The clock struck, and she fled. He looked after her till she was out of sight.

CHAPTER IX.

Here, lest France be thought morbid, and since the dead friend of whom mention has so often been made has a bearing upon the story of Gertrude, let a few words be devoted to Broughton Essex and to his mother.

Though the season was over, and London in the accepted sense was empty, though the grass in the parks was burned, and the leaves on the trees showed signs of dust and soot having done their fell work, there stayed on, perhaps for the first time in her life, a woman who in happier days had been wont to follow the fashion. This was Mrs. Essex.

It was a relief to her, indeed, to hear no longer a visitor's knock. She had taken small comfort from the sympathy of the smart women who came in leaving their laughter in their carriages, breaking off, perhaps, in some little tale of scandal, and putting on an expression of pain and condolence with a low voice at the door, pressing her hand, murmuring all the trite things that are commonly addressed to bereavement, speaking in conventional phrases that meant nothing, using such terms as "all-wise ruling," "better land," and the like, and going away, as she was sure they did go away, with

a sense of satisfaction at an unpleasant duty performed.

Tears were far from her at such moments. She felt hardened, and could answer platitude for platitude; and some of her friends, settling themselves comfortably in the cushions of their carriages, said they did not believe she "felt it a bit."

"What do they want of me? Can't they leave me alone?" was her outcry when she rose up from her illness, and her acquaintances called to inquire for her. It was only after a time that she had yielded to their importunity and admitted them, with the result that in their presence she cloaked herself with a callousness which nothing could pierce.

In solitude she paid dearly for this. The eyes that were dry before others—dry and even hard, shed then their quota of tears. She wondered how long she had to live, for the future to her was but a time of waiting, and the days came and went without joy.

Her moods alternated with her thoughts. She had no fixed belief to give her comfort in her trouble. She was a woman who read everything and had no definitely-formed opinions. At one time she clung to such hopes of a reunion as seemed to be held out by the doctrines of Christianity, and she turned feverishly to her Bible and marked passage after passage. There was a promise here and here and here. Then, with a hideous feeling of sickness, she asked herself upon what grounds did she suppose her son had fulfilled the conditions so arbitrarily laid down.

He was as she knew him—thoughtless, careless, light of heart. She had never wished him otherwise. The

book which spoke of the promise spoke, too, of repentance, of a broken spirit and contrition. She had not lived with her eyes shut, and she did not suppose that her son, who had gone through his short life laughing, had differed very much from other men. Would she have wished him to differ from them? He was lovable in no common degree, he was generous to extravagance; she had never heard an unkind word from his lips, and he had not an enemy in the world. Was not that enough? Good? Who was good if not her son? It was not the goodness of the Bible—then let the Bible keep its promises to itself. She would rather think that death was the end of all. Bruff was dead, let her die too!

Materialism led only to a despair more dogged, and—the rest was speculation. She could not think that death was the final goal of the soul, and, unlike most people, she was not able to leave the matter unsettled. It was a question for which she must find an answer. She spent herself in prayers. She had been brought up as a Protestant, and in a narrow school. She remembered that she had been taught that to pray for the dead was futile. She was driven back to rebellion. She read more books than before. The word "saved" became loathsome to her—a word without a meaning. If Bruff was not "saved" then neither did she wish to be. What was "saved?"

It was in this mood that she received her son's friend on the day of his visit to her. His presence brought her the first comfort she had experienced. France could only tell her with tears in his own eyes of the last moments of the friend he had loved. Broughton had no fear of death. He sent many messages to his

mother. He had had no strong religious convictions in his short and merry life, but in his death he had no doubts to frighten him. He died quite happy, he sent word, only wishing that he could have seen her again. He was too ill at the time greatly to wish to live. Woodford was the bearer of his last letter. It was written faintly and in a straggling hand not many minutes before the end.

"I was sitting beside him, and I thought he was asleep. He was lying with his eyes closed and I was looking at him, and—my God!—I was wondering what I should do without him. He had been weaker all day. The doctor told me he did not expect to see him alive again. I went through the darkest hour of my life—"

Woodford broke off. Mrs. Essex's face was buried in her arms upon the table. Her form shook. France recovered himself.

"He opened his eyes and looked at me, and he put out his hand. And I couldn't tell him, but he knew. He spoke of you then, and he said he would like to write to you. I asked him if I should write for him, but he wouldn't have that. He made me lift him up and give him a pencil and paper, and he wrote that. He asked me to give it to you myself after—after—whenever I saw you. I don't think he had finished it when the pencil fell, and when I got it for him again he couldn't hold it. Then I sat down beside him on the bed with my arms round him, and he talked sometimes. He told me what you had been to him—I wonder whether you know how much he loved you; and—and we had talked sometimes of religion. I don't know what he believed, but he said then that he knew that it was all

right—just that. He didn't mind dying except for the sake of those he left behind. And then I remember some of the boys came to the door, and he said good-bye to each of them, and one of them—it was Flick Robson—broke down and rushed out of the room. Then after that they all went and left us alone. I still held him up in my arms. He said he could breathe better, and presently he said he was very tired, and he rested his head on my shoulder. And so I sat. I thought he was asleep. I didn't move. I heard him sigh very gently. When I looked at him he was dead."

It was small wonder, perhaps, that Woodford, returning that night to the Manor after this interview, and with his memories of the dead friend fresh in his mind, should have been unable to keep his name out of a conversation even with a stranger such as Miss Maxwell had then been to him.

Since the day of his visit to her Mrs. Essex's mood had given place to one less bitter. The knowledge that her son had had no fear in death comforted her in a way that may have been illogical, but that was nevertheless very real.

The letter France had brought to her was this:

"My Darling Mother,—I wish I could lessen the blow my death will be to you, and I wish—oh, I wish—I could have seen you again! I am writing this partly because, though you will hear all about me from Woodford, you will hear nothing of what he has done for me. He has been with me night and day. There is no sacrifice of himself that he has not or would not have made for my sake. He can never know all that he has been

to me. Tell him this. Tell him that but for the separation from you . . ." The straggling sentence was not ended. Another was begun: "Dearest, dearest mother. I wish . . . ."

The letter broke off unfinished. Here the pencil had fallen from the dying fingers, and the wish was not expressed. Mrs. Essex forever wondered what words they were which her son had lacked the strength to write. She had written to ask Woodford, and at the same time she had enclosed the letter from her son. But he could not tell her. In returning the pencilled sheet he wrote:

"It was like poor Bruff to write these kind things of me. I did nothing for him that he would not have done for me. I can only say that he was dearer to me than any one in the world, and that no one will ever take his place."

For her son's sake Mrs. Essex had always taken in Woodford an interest which was now increased tenfold, and, since she knew him, her interest in him was for his own sake as well. In almost all Bruff's letters, which she read again and again, there was some mention of him.

"I wish you could know him," he wrote in one; "I wish you could know him, and I know how much you would like him. I am sending you some photographs he has done. They are wonderfully good, and they give you a very fair idea of our surroundings —rough, aren't they? It is funny that if I were a poor devil who had to work here for his living, that I should hate it. I love it. But then, I should be content with France at the North Pole. . . . You can think of us on

most evenings sitting on that log under the big tree in the smaller photograph. We sit there and smoke, and France sings a bit sometimes to his banjo. He has a very sweet voice, and a way of using it that touches one, as the more trained singing of a better musician might easily fail to do. He would tell you his songs were clap-trap. Perhaps there is nothing written for the banjo that isn't, but as he sings them they go straight to one's heart."

A score of letters had the same burden. Another said: "I am going to bring France home with me this year. I almost think we might be back with you for Easter, and if things go well, we could stay six months. Don't count on this yet, for there will be a lot to settle before we could both leave the ranch at the same time. Dear mother, how good it will be to see you again! . . ."

But, for Essex, Easter never came. A short letter said: "France is down with a fever, and I am very anxious about him. The doctor says it is some sort of gastric attack. . . ."

One, later, said: "He is much better. He has pulled through wonderfully."

Then in the bundle from which Mrs. Essex was reading came others telling that he was still better; then well. After these was the first warning of the shadow that was to fall. It scarcely even seemed a warning then. It was in Woodford's writing, to say that Bruff was not well, and that, as he did not like to miss a mail, he had asked him to write for him. It was nothing serious, and Mrs. Essex need not be alarmed.

The next letter was again in Woodford's hand. Essex was still not well. What had first been supposed to be

a chill had developed into a gastric fever like that from which Woodford himself had lately recovered. There was as yet no cause for alarm. Essex was keeping up his strength. He sent his love, and a message telling his mother not to be uneasy.

He might as well have sent a message to the sea, telling it to be still. Mrs. Essex remembered the terrible days of anxiety that followed. She even made preparations to go to him. She booked a passage to America. She had just returned from doing so when there was handed to her the telegram which said: "Broughton dangerously ill." She lived over again the awful hours that followed. She had wandered from room to room in a frenzy of impatience for the morrow, which was to have seen her on the way to him. But before that morrow came the second message, which told her that her son was dead.

Mrs. Essex unlocked a drawer, and took from it a document. She read it through carefully, and more than once her eyes filled with tears. It was her will, and it left everything she possessed to one to whom the riches of this world were now of no account.

If Lady Julia Maxwell could have known what came into Mrs. Essex's mind then, she would possibly have considerably changed her attitude with regard to France Woodford.

CHAPTER X.

Gertrude accomplished what is known theatrically as a quick change, and made her appearance in the drawing-room not many minutes after dinner had been announced. Her bright eyes and her heightened color did not escape Lady Julia, who accounted for both when presently, in answer to a question as to whether she had seen any one out, Gertrude mentioned that she had met Mr. Woodford. It did not seem to her either necessary or expedient to evade a reply, and she made the statement frankly.

"He had no news to tell me," she said. "It seems to have rained as steadily at Parkhurst as it did here. Mrs. Woodford has had a cold—"

"Then perhaps she won't be able to dine here on Thursday."

"Oh yes," said Gertrude; "she is better."

Lady Julia did not express much gratification at this.

"But after all," she was thinking to herself, "I suppose young Woodford would come, anyway, so she may just as well be here as not."

"I thought you were going to the village?" she said, aloud.

"So I was, but I did not get so far," said Gertrude.

"And yet you had plenty of time," said her aunt.

Lady Julia's occupation seemed to be a drawing of inferences. Gertrude was indignant, but she said nothing.

The evening passed without event. Lady Julia, before she fell into a doze over her work in front of the fire, remarked that her niece was still somewhat restless. She went to the piano and played a little, and in running from one air into another, her fingers unconsciously struck a few notes of the ranch song. Then she left the instrument abruptly, and bent over a book. Lady Julia watched her as she sat with her elbows upon a table and her hands supporting her head. The light from a shaded lamp fell upon her hair and tinged her soft white draperies with color. Lady Julia could only see from her position the oval of the girl's cheek, but it was her impression that she was not reading. A few minutes passed, and the book was closed. Gertrude went to the window and drew the curtain to look out. Lady Julia's last recollection before she fell asleep was that her niece had returned to the piano. When she awoke, Gertrude had gone to bed.

The next day broke clear and bright. The sun poured into Gertrude's room as she dressed. From her window she saw that the gray and soaked world of yesterday was a world of warmth and light to-day. The hills seemed to smile under the cloudless sky. A hundred summer scents came up to her from the garden below, and once more the air vibrated with the hum of insect life. A cow was lowing in a meadow. From the stables came the yelping of the dogs and sometimes the sound of a bucket on the bricks of the yard. The gardeners were busily repairing in the beds the damage of the rain. Gertrude heard her aunt's metallic voice calling out some direction. She could not catch the words, though she heard the answer:

"I am out of wire, my lady."

Something more was said in the metallic tones, probably:

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

The answer at least fitted some such question:

"I meant to, my lady, but what with the rain and one thing and another, it slipped my memory."

A window was impatiently closed.

At breakfast Lady Julia said the man was an idiot. Later Gertrude turned the incident to her own account. She was wishing that she had asked Woodford to bring his banjo, when she remembered that her brother Henry, who dabbled in everything and stuck to nothing, had at one time taken up the banjo. He had left his instrument at Eastwood on his last visit. After some futile search Gertrude found it in its case on the top of the wardrobe in the room he had occupied, whither, she concluded, it had been relegated by a vigilant housemaid. The wire of which the gardener was in need would furnish a pretext for a ride into Parkhurst, and then she would buy a set of strings. Gertrude need not have been at a loss for an excuse. Lady Julia had at all times a hundred and one commissions for those who went into the town.

On the road Gertrude met no one. The Vicarage girls nodded to her from an upper window of the house in the village, whence, like Mrs. Peck of Peckham, they watched the comings and goings of parishioners. As Gertrude neared the Manor she wondered if France was about. She could not have told whether at that moment she most wished or feared to meet him. To see him was always a dangerous pleasure. It brought

in its train an unrest which was at once sweet and painful. A man stood at the lodge gate, and Gertrude trembled and could have turned to go another way. She passed him; it was not France, and she was chilled with disappointment. What did she indeed desire?

Then once more her spirits rose. Was there not before her the knowledge that he was going to dine at Eastwood? She could look forward. She could wait without a sight of him—could rest upon her last recollection of him until she saw him there. In very excess of joy she urged her mare from a walk to a trot, from a trot to a canter along the soft path at the edge of the road. It seemed to her that she had but just begun to live. And love was the breath of her life. Oh, the summer weather! and oh, the bright, bright sun! She wished to sing. The exuberance of her spirits communicated itself to the mare she rode. She had ridden from a child, and horse and rider were in perfect accord. The intoxication of the swinging of the canter caused the blood to course in her veins. The recent rain had cooled the air, and it smote her glowing cheeks freshly; and she wished for November, and a day with the hounds. It was only another way of saying, "I should like to ride with you, France Woodford—away, across country to the end of the world, and then die!"

The outskirts of Parkhurst began to dot the country with houses, as a heap of grain is skirted with single seeds. She steadied her mare to a walk. Her groom, red in the face and shining, said, "Praise the Lord!" under his breath, and mopped his forehead. It was August, and he was not in love.

The Parkhurst shops presented no very grave temp-

tation. It was with a feeling of satisfaction that, having executed the less interesting commissions of her aunt, Gertrude tucked a little roll of strings into the body of her habit. She proceeded then to the station to change the books from the library.

While she was standing at the book-stall a man came out on to the platform to look at the clock. She recognized Brabant, and she was immediately engrossed in the volume she held. She hoped that he had not seen her. He disappeared into the booking-office, and Gertrude waited to give him time to go. When five minutes had elapsed she made her selection, and the strapful of books was taken out to the servant. Following the messenger she came upon Brabant at the door.

He raised his hat and looked at his gloves.

"I thought I might put you into the saddle," he said.

Gertrude inclined her head.

"My groom will do that," she said, coldly.

She made as if she would pass him. He did not move.

"Oh," he said, "I have something to say to you! I knew, of course, that you saw me. I waited at the risk of your displeasure—"

He broke off.

Gertrude was silent. His restless eyes were on hers, and she met them with a level glance. She would not help him. He looked down at his boots and moved one foot along a crack in a board of the floor. It chanced that Gertrude at the book-stall had taken off her glove. The white and pink of her hand against her dark habit caught his attention. The mark upon her wrist was now barely visible; but he could see it.

"I ought to have been horsewhipped for that," he said; "and I want you to know how sorry I am. I have thought of nothing else since. I don't suppose you minded the pain so much as that I should have dared to kiss you! But—you might pity a poor devil, Miss Maxwell. You know what you said to me at the time. You told me I had no self-control. It is just that—and it is my curse. Won't you let it speak for me? Won't you forgive me? I—don't pretend to deserve it, but I want you to say you forgive me."

He spoke penitently. Gertrude, looking at him, saw him suddenly as a great school-boy who had done wrong.

She gave him her hand. His own closed over it. She did not say a word. Something glistened in his eyes.

And when she was turning into Eastwood at the lodge gates, with a light heart and a vague impression that one of her commissions was forgotten, he was lying in a field between Parkhurst and his home with his face buried in his sleeve.

Gertrude hastened to dust her brother's banjo, and to adjust the strings. She was thus employed when Lady Julia came in from a visit upon parochial matters to the Vicarage.

"You must hide that before Henry comes here again," she said. "If he saw it, he might be induced to take it up again—and Heaven preserve us from that! Do you remember his eternal break-downs?"

It did not occur to her to connect the instrument with Woodford. It was associated in her mind with a perpetual and inaccurate twanging that was the reverse of romantic.

"How badly Henry played it," she added.

Gertrude bent over the hoop. She still wore her habit, and her figure looked slight and straight and trim. Her hands moved deftly in fixing the strings. She had been working with a grave face. The smile that broke over it was the result, perhaps, of a recollection of Henry's playing. She tightened a peg, running her eyes up the neck of the instrument. Then moving her left foot a little forward, and watching from under her half-drooped eyelids her fingers as they pressed the strings, she struck a few chords tentatively, and found that her task was done. She remained for a minute or so in the same attitude. There was something in it that was undefinably graceful.

Lady Julia, fresh from the Vicarage, was thinking that she had only to see other girls to know how infinitely her niece surpassed them in beauty and charm.

The sight at this moment of Wilson passing the window with his wheelbarrow took Lady Julia's thoughts from Gertrude to gardening.

"Oh yes, the wire, Gertrude. What have you done with it?"

Gertrude looked up from her banjo in dismay.

"The wire!" she said, blankly; "I forgot all about it."

"I thought that was what you went for!" said Lady Julia.

CHAPTER XI.

Lady Julia came down to the drawing-room buttoning her gloves. Gertrude was before her, and was standing by the mantel-piece bending over a great bowl of roses. Her aunt was struck by the lines into which the silk of the trailing gown fell, as the girl half turned at her entrance. The pose of her head as she looked over her shoulder appealed to Lady Julia's sense of the beautiful, and she said with seeming irrelevance that she wished there was any one coming to dinner who was worth the trouble of entertaining.

"I shall certainly take you up to town next year, Gertrude, unless anything happens between this and then to prevent it."

"I am quite satisfied here," said her niece.

"A bad sign," said Lady Julia to herself.

From time to time she returned to a contemplation of the girl. The plainness of her white dress was almost classical. She might have stepped down from the pedestal of Galatea. It was a pity, thought Lady Julia, that the Pygmalion who was so handsome should be so hopelessly ineligible.

Of the Mariners from the Vicarage, who were the first people to arrive, a story that had currency in the neighborhood will show that their position in the county was not very strong. Once upon a time a certain person, whose name never transpired, was walking through the village and met Mr. Mariner, who said, "I

was dining at Eastwood last night. The St. Pancrases were there. Lady St. Pancras a most intellectual woman." A little farther on, so runs the vulgar tale, the person of name undivulged met Mrs. Mariner. "Such a pleasant party at Eastwood last night. Lord St. Pancras—such a charming man." And yet a little farther on the narrator met one of the girls, who said, "I am so tired. We didn't get away from Eastwood last night till quite late—yes, a dinner-party. Do you know the St. Pancrases? They were there."

This little story may or may not have been true. It clung to the Mariners, however, and went into many editions.

Mrs. Mariner was gorgeous in red velvet and a set of Aberystwith pebbles, picked up by herself upon the beach, and made into a monstrous necklace with pendants.

Gertrude met the eye of little Harwood and laughed.

The room began to fill. At length all but the Woodfords had arrived. They were late, and Gertrude watched the door nervously. The sound of a carriage on the gravel amid the hum of talk was heard perhaps only by herself. She talked absently to Elsie Mariner of Mrs. Hatton's coming concert. Miss Mariner could not make up her mind what to sing. What would Gertrude advise? Gertrude tried to remember what she was talking about.

The door was opened. A single name was announced. An expression that changed from apprehension to dismay came over her face as she saw Mrs. Woodford advance alone. Gertrude would not believe her eyes. He was in the hall, perhaps, taking off his coat. He must

be there—he must. Nothing could have kept him away. Why, then, did he not come in? Mrs. Woodford was making some long explanation to Lady Julia. It could not mean that France was not coming!

Mrs. Mariner was still talking, but Gertrude did not listen. Lady Julia was saying something that sounded like "so sorry" with a cheerfulness that looked like "so glad."

Dinner was announced. It was true, then, Woodford was not coming. Gertrude found herself walking into the dining-room beside some one. She could scarcely have answered without thought whether it was Harwood or the vicar. A footman was removing the chair of the absent guest, and Gertrude could have cried in the blankness of her disappointment. It was with difficulty that she made her voice sound unconcerned as she bent forward to speak across her neighbor to Mrs. Woodford.

"Mr. Woodford was not able to come?" she asked.

"And through my fault," said Mrs. Woodford. "I had some business that had to be settled with my solicitor at Gaston, and I asked France to see to it for me, so he went in this morning by the ten o'clock train from Parkhurst, and he was to be back by six to be in time to get here. I got a telegram just before I started to say there had been an accident at Hawton—that is the next station to Gaston on this side—and the line would be blocked for four hours at least."

"He wasn't in it," said Gertrude, quickly—"the accident, I mean?"

"Oh no; it was a goods train that was run into by an engine, and he has only the inconvenience of delay."

"Enough, that," said Gertrude.

Harwood began to tell all that he knew of accidents —how a friend of his own had been killed in a collision somewhere in America, and how he himself had once nearly travelled by a train that had been wrecked in Lancashire. All this was told with much detail.

"And," he said, in conclusion, "I was only prevented going in it by meeting a chap I knew, and being led into the refreshment-room to have a whisky-and-soda. My great argument against temperance has been ever since that I owe my life to drink."

Gertrude was looking at him, and appeared to be listening, but she did not smile.

The party was hateful to her, and the burden of it intolerable. Mrs. Mariner was telling of the finding of the Aberystwith pebbles.

"For trinkets," she said, "I have no taste. I never allow my girls to wear them, but a thing with a history —that's different. I caught a bad cold the day I found the first stone, and I remember it by that. I sat, you know, in wet feet, though I had always supposed sea-water was harmless. Then that one that hangs by the clasp I got in a most curious way. Mabel, my younger girl, a child at the time, was choking, and her father said, 'Jane, she's got something in her mouth,' and so she had. She was playing on the beach, and with children everything goes into their mouths. It's my largest stone, and has been thought by many persons to be unique. Lord St. Pancras, whom I had the gratification of meeting here at dear Lady Julia's table, said to me—"

Mrs. Mariner over a title was expansive.

Dinner seemed to Gertrude insufferably long. What was it to her that the Eastwood cook and the Eastwood cellar were locally famous? No one wished to hurry but herself. Harwood had turned to Elsie Mariner, who sat upon his other side, and Gertrude was glad of a few moments' silence. Silence! Was there ever such a babble? What an odious dinner-party it was!

Then quite suddenly, and with a feeling of indignation that sent a color to her face, Gertrude realized that she was glad that France was not there.

With the exception of Harwood and Mrs. Woodford, there was not a guest who belonged to the better set of the neighborhood. Such people as were present were those whom it was inevitable that Lady Julia should occasionally invite, and she always endeavored to ask them together, and so get rid of an unpleasant duty. Mrs. Woodford was a simple little woman to whom it would never occur to remark this, and Harwood, having no womenkind, could afford to know every one. But Gertrude set her teeth when she thought that it was to a party of this sort that Lady Julia had dared to ask France Woodford.

At length the ladies went to the drawing-room. Gertrude devoted herself to Mrs. Woodford. She had got over her first anger with her for sending her nephew upon the errand which had prevented his coming to Eastwood. To every one else Miss Maxwell was distant and unresponsive. Lady Julia was genial, and remembered to speak to each of her guests on his or her own subject. She talked to one of pictures, to another of pigs. In this way she made herself popular. Gertrude had not so happy a memory, or possibly she took

less trouble. When she was bored she found it difficult to pretend an interest she did not feel. She asked the picture fancier about his pigs.

Her eyes fell on the banjo. Her search for it, her ride into Parkhurst for strings for it had gone for nothing. Was France chafing under the delay that had prevented his presence to-night? She hoped that he was disappointed, as she was disappointed. What was he doing? Was he helping to clear the line? He was strong. He knew the meaning of work—she could see him with his coat off and his shirt-sleeves rolled up, giving what aid was in his power. Presently she remembered that there had been no danger to life; there would be no need of his help.

Harwood was talking to her.

"Aren't you going to sing or play?"

"No," said Gertrude, "I am not."

Then it occurred to her that she had spoken with unnecessary severity. He, at least, had done no harm.

She stepped through the open window into the garden and the summer night. Harwood followed. The shrubs and trees looked dark. A cool breeze was stirring. A wedding in Parkhurst had caused the bells to ring.

"How plainly one hears," said Gertrude, gently.

She held up her hand.

"Where does Hawton lie?" she asked, at the end of a silence which the bells on a gust of the breeze broke softly.

He pointed westward.

"Somewhere in that direction. A little to the right, perhaps, of where I am pointing. I should think Woodford was swearing a bit."

"I hope so. Still, I am not sorry he did not come. I didn't realize till to-night the people Aunt Julia had asked, or perhaps I would have warned you. Aren't they odious? I am excepting you, of course, and Mrs. Woodford. Hasn't it been dull? Doesn't Mrs. Mariner look dreadful with those enormous pebbles? Don't you feel that each of them ought to have a little bit of paper stuck upon it, with its Latin name and a few English particulars? She is like a case in the British Museum."

"Oh, Gertrude," said little Harwood, "I am so awfully in love with you!"

"What, still?" said Miss Maxwell. "I am sorry for that, for I must go in-doors. It must be nearly eleven. Do you think they will go soon?"

She took another look in the direction in which he had told her lay the scene of the accident. Then to comfort him—he was not quite as tall as she—she laid her hand gently on his shoulder.

"You'll live to love another day, Bobby," she said, and he followed her happily into the house.

Eleven o'clock struck, and people began to move. When the last good-nights had been spoken, and the door had closed behind the last guest, Lady Julia and Gertrude gave simultaneously a sigh of relief.

"That's over for six months," said Lady Julia, pushing back a chair into its place. "I must say, Gertrude, you didn't give me much help."

Miss Maxwell made no answer.

Lady Julia was irritable, and pressed her point.

"You scarcely talked to any of them," she said, crossly. "I don't think it very good manners. You can be

pleasant enough among your own smart friends. You know as well as I do that these people have to be asked as a matter of policy. You don't suppose I have them here for my own pleasure?"

"I should scarcely think Mrs. Woodford would ever come here again," said Gertrude. "To ask her to meet such people was a deliberate insult."

"Indeed!" said Lady Julia. "And who are the Woodfords?"

"There were Woodfords of the Manor before the Maxwells were heard of," said Gertrude, quietly.

And then she regretted her indiscretion.

CHAPTER XII.

A DISAGREEABLE evening had ended disagreeably. What more fitting conclusion to hours so tediously spent? Gertrude's eyes filled with tears as she gained her room and remembered with what different feelings she had left it a few hours earlier. She sent her maid to bed, and went and stood before her glass. She was very pale, and her eyes looked big and tragic. Her hair in the shadow had no faintest gleam of gold. She remembered the face that had smiled to her from that same glass. Then the room had been bright with candles. A solitary pair stood now upon her dressing-table, and the gloom was depressing. She went round and lit others, and the room grew light as before. Then she returned to the contemplation of herself. She watched the tears gather in her eyes with a sort of

mournful pleasure. How bright those eyes had been with expectation! She remembered the color that now had left her cheeks, and she remembered, too, the glad throbbing of her heart. She had scarcely known how keenly she was looking forward to this party. She had been living upon the thought of having France under the roof of Eastwood for a whole evening. Again and again she lived through those few moments when she had experienced a sudden fear, and had fought against the conviction that so soon became a certain knowledge, that Woodford had not come, and was not coming. She remembered how the joy of living had been for the time extinguished. . . . Then she thought of the moment in which she had realized the sort of party to which he had been bidden. She had not seen the list —by chance, she had thought, by design, as she now knew—and in any case she had been too much absorbed to pay any heed to the names, even had she known them. He was coming—that was all that mattered. It was unpardonable of her aunt to have asked him in such company. But Gertrude understood its meaning. She had even been foolish enough to allow Lady Julia to see that she understood. It was some time since Miss Maxwell had cried.

Breakfast the next morning passed stiffly. Lady Julia talked, but her niece was preoccupied, and made little response. Gertrude went into the garden. The recent rain seemed to have taken a month off the age of every leaf and blade. The air to-day had that clearness that cheats the eye. The hills seemed nearer by several miles. The window of a cottage on a slope caught the sun, and looked like a monstrous diamond.

Lady Julia came out onto the terrace. She shaded her eyes with a yellow envelope.

"Gertrude, I have just got a telegram from St. Pancras. He is passing through Parkhurst, and he wants to see me on business, so I am off at once. I sha'n't be in to lunch. I shall get something to eat at the Sceptre."

"Very well."

"I don't quite know when I shall be home, for I may as well get through some of the visits that I have to pay round there."

She nodded and went into the house. Ten minutes later Gertrude heard the carriage roll away. There had been no restraint before, and yet she felt more free. A lark was singing overhead. The dogs—a collie, a retriever, and a terrier—came bounding towards her. They must have come out of the stable-yard with the carriage. She knelt down and caressed them. For no apparent reason her spirits were rising. In the distance she heard the sound of hoofs; they passed out of hearing; presently she heard them again. A cat, with bushy tail erect, came down onto the lawn to rub herself against Gertrude's skirts, and to affect to the dogs an enmity she did not feel. Gertrude began to pick some flowers; the animals, canine and feline, following her from bed to bed. And as she plucked heliotrope and mignonette and verbena she fell to wondering as to the nature of her aunt's business with her quondam guardian. Thank goodness she was of age now, and could do as she liked! There had been a time when it had been necessary to consult Lord St. Pancras upon all that concerned her. She did him the justice to admit that

he had never opposed her seriously. Afterwards it struck her as curious that, at this moment, she should have thought of the time when she had been his ward. It was almost as if she had divined that her aunt's business with him affected herself. Again Gertrude heard the sound of hoofs. It was nearer now, and seemed to take its place permanently among the pleasant noises of the summer day. It came nearer still. A horse was coming up the drive.

A sudden conviction sent Gertrude flying into the house. She heard the butler saying that Lady Julia was not at home. She crossed the hall and saw France Woodford. His horse moved restlessly on the gravel while he bent to speak to Parker.

Gertrude went out on the steps.

"Aunt Julia is out," she said; "but do come in. Didn't you pass her? She has driven into Parkhust."

"I came round by Harwood, and so I suppose I missed her."

Gertrude was patting his horse, and the animal sought provender in the bunch of flowers she was holding.

"Do come in," said Gertrude; "they will take your horse round to the stables. I want to hear all about the accident."

Woodford dismounted, and a groom appeared in answer to the butler's summons.

She led the way into the garden.

"I came over to apologize about last night. I didn't get home till half-past nine. I never was so disappointed about anything. I can only hope that the recording angel was not about with his note-book when I was told it would be four or five hours before the line

could be cleared. Otherwise, he must have jotted down a page or two of my idle words."

Gertrude smiled.

"What did you do?"

"I tried to walk off my annoyance—it was more than annoyance. I chafed at the delay, even when I knew that it was inevitable."

"That was not philosophical."

"It did not seem a time for philosophy. I had been looking forward to last night for days."

"Had you?"

Gertrude's tone expressed a good deal. She stopped to pick a rose. She failed to break the stalk, and he came to her assistance. Bending over it their heads were close together.

"You know that I had," he said.

There seemed a pulse in the summer air. A broken sunlight fell through the gaps in a tree upon his coat, and a bee rested for a moment upon his shoulder, and thence alighted on the flower which was passing from his hands to hers. She gently shook the insect off the petals.

"I hoped you were going to give me that," he said, as he watched her put the rose into the body of her dress.

"Not this one," she answered, with a smile. "Lend me your knife."

She returned to the tree whence he had plucked the rose she wore. She looked for an opening bud, and chose the best she saw. But he stayed her hand.

"Not that one," he said.

"Which, then?"

"There is one I like better."

He watched her as she sought his choice. She found it almost at once in a blossom twin to that he had picked for her. The roses had grown upon a fork branching off one stem.

"This?"

He nodded in silence, and looked on as she cut the stalk, and with it, by accident, the leaf that belonged to the flower. A wheelbarrow stood near, and she sat down upon the handles and laid the rose and the detached leaf upon her lap, looking about her for something with which to tie the one to the other. Nothing at hand suggested itself to her, and so, telling him to wait, she left him and disappeared through a window into the house. She returned with a thread of yellow silk, and as she came she bound the leaf to the bud.

With a misgiving, as he took the flower from her hand, Gertrude heard the clock on the stable ring out the first interval of its tune. He heard it too.

"The quarter after what?—twelve?"

He looked at his watch.

"One!" he cried, in dismay; "I must go."

For a moment Gertrude hesitated. Then she remembered that she was sufficiently advanced to defy the petty proprieties.

"Will you stay to lunch?"

"Do you mean it?"

"It would be a charity; I am all alone."

It could scarcely be expected of him to refuse, and he did not. Half an hour later France Woodford and Gertrude were sitting *tête-à-tête* in the dining-room. They lingered over their enjoyment. Except under different circumstances it could never occur again. The

knowledge of this gave point to their pleasure. The scented air came in through the open windows. The light falling on the decanters threw stains of red and amber on the white of the cloth. How neatly Woodford carved! How light and infectious was his laugh! He was thinking that he was amply repaid for his disappointment of the night before. He said so, and Gertrude told him how dull the party had been. He said that he should not have found it dull.

"And I wanted to hear you sing," she said.

"But I don't profess to sing, except to the banjo."

"I mean to the banjo."

"But I don't carry it about."

"There is one here. My brother used to play. I wish you knew Henry. I think you would get on together."

"I am sure of it."

Another stage was reached.

France looked round the luxurious room. He must understand, he told himself fiercely, that this beautiful girl's kindness to him meant nothing. Gertrude saw the look that for a moment passed over his face. It was much the same look of dogged sorrow as his face had worn when he had spoken of the friend who died. But she did not interpret it. He put thought from him, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of the moment. Gertrude would not think either.

What need, indeed, to think of the future when the present was so sweet?

The cold meats had an added flavor, the wines were nectar, the day was passing fair. The grim portrait of an ancestor caught her eye, and she saw in it a likeness

she could not trace. Parker, amused but discreet, came up to know whether he should bring coffee to the dining-room or the terrace.

"The terrace," said Miss Maxwell, and thither she presently led the way. Woodford noted the grace of her walk. Already she began to think of the blank there would be when he was gone. The recollection that presently this unconventional visit of his must be ended weighed upon her as the knowledge of impending calamity. If time would but be stayed! There was a drop of bitterness in the cup of her joy—in his a drop more bitter still.

She fetched the banjo presently and put it into his hands. She watched him as he skilfully tuned the strings. His fingers were pliant, his ear was very true. He played softly a few break-downs of the usual order, and then he began to sing. Gertrude stayed the movement of her rocking-chair, and lay back with her eyes upon his face. He had a sweet voice, and Gertrude experienced what Essex had felt when he said of France's singing that it went straight to the heart. He sang the "Suwanee River" and then "Dirch Doe." The sentiment might be cheap—he laughed and said so presently—but Gertrude would not analyze her feelings. The breeze came gently round the corner of the house, and the rose-leaves stirred. A squirrel ran across the lawn. A sheep-bell tinkled in the distance. A pleasant smell of burning wood told of a bonfire somewhere near.

"Do you know the 'Song of a Ranch?'" Gertrude asked, after a pause.

France did not answer for a moment. When he spoke it was in a tone that she had heard before.

"Yes; I used to sing it. I don't know that I could now."

"Why not?"

"It was Bruff's song."

Something like a pang of jealousy shot through Gertrude's heart. It seemed to her then that between herself and France must always stand the shadow of the dead friend. The wish was strong on her to try her power.

"I want to hear you sing it."

"I would rather not."

Gertrude persisted.

"Because—"

"Because it is sacred to Bruff. It was his song. Don't ask me. I would rather not."

"I have asked you," said Gertrude; "I will not again."

She looked over towards the hills. They seemed gilded in the strong sunlight. France glanced at her, and could read nothing from her expression. He followed the direction of her eyes. His fingers moved softly on the strings:

> "'Out in the west the shadows are falling,
> The red red sun sets the prairie aflame.'"

Gertrude turned to him. Her eyes seemed to have absorbed some of the light from the hills.

"Don't sing it," she said; "please don't. It was horrid of me to ask you, and—I am sorry."

France struck a few chords, and under his fingers the air changed to another.

"It is foolish of me," he said, slowly, "but I think

you would understand if you knew the associations the song has for me. It was a favorite song of his."

After a pause France added:

"He made me sing it to him the day he died."

"Oh, I am sorry," said Gertrude; "I am sorry."

"So you see," said France, "that it is sentiment, and sentiment is always foolish."

"It isn't," said Gertrude; "oh, it was horrible of me, and indeed I am sorry. What can I say? I feel as if I had wounded you—it was like wrenching a broken arm—"

She seemed to be speaking more to herself than to him, when she added:

"It was not fair to myself either. I don't think of him as between you and every other friend. I think he will be first with you always, but he—is dead, and one could grudge him nothing of your thought of him. It must be dreadful to die. Don't judge me by what I said. It was not like me. I think of him as a friend, too—I told you long ago that I felt as if I had known him. It was horrible of me to hurt you—horrible to him, and he is not here."

Gertrude spoke very quickly. A color had risen to her face, and her eyes had travelled once more to the golden hills. She did not look at him. Her hands were clasped in her lap. Woodford's fingers had fallen from the strings. The banjo lay across his knees, and he bent forward over it and watched her face. He did not follow all that she said. The first few sentences were not for him, and the others he did not fully understand. When at length she turned to him, her eyes were full of tears.

"You have done nothing to be sorry for," he said, quickly; "on the contrary, you have been awfully kind to me—too kind, perhaps, for my happiness."

His tone fell almost to a whisper. So still were the pair on the terrace then, that a chaffinch alighted on the path almost at their feet. The shadow of the house spread like a stain on the gravel. The stable clock played its full tune and struck four. A sound of wheels on the drive was unheeded.

It was not till Lady Julia's metallic voice made itself heard in the hall that Gertrude realized that the pleasant hours were over.

CHAPTER XIII.

Gertrude lay awake long that night thinking of the events of the day. It was a day to mark and to remember. What if she had not heard his horse's hoofs? Lady Julia had been out; would he have asked for herself? This thought presented two others that were for a time disquieting. If not, either he did not care to see her (a theory quickly dispelled), or else he was conventional, in which case he must have been surprised at receiving an invitation to lunch with her alone. She tried to remember whether he had seemed shocked. But with all a woman's power of self-torture upon a trivial point, Gertrude could not construe his demeanor in that light. On the contrary, he had accepted with alacrity. He had understood her, and she had not fallen in his estimation. She had not bought those glad hours

at so dear a cost. Her curtains were not closed, and from her bed she could see the sky. A crescent moon hung low in the heavens, bright as a silver sickle. The stars were lavish in their number. The night throbbed with their twinkling. Gertrude, lying broad awake, with wide eyes that borrowed of their brightness, seemed to be feeling the pulse of heaven.

She could not sleep, nor did she wish it. She rose and threw on a light wrapper. Her hair fell heavily on her shoulders, and a mirror as she passed it showed her eyes gleaming in the dusk. Her heart throbbed like the stars. Was Woodford sleeping, or was his rest disturbed with as glad a pain as her own? Was she most glad or most sad? She could not tell.

She went to the window and threw it open. She breathed in deeply the scents of field and flower. A bat flapped by. A giant moth fanned her burning face as it fluttered softly past her. The air played gently with her hair, and to her hot lips it was as a draught of spring-water. A cobweb, detached, floated slowly downward, and, catching the moonlight, shone like a thread of silk. A white owl flew out from the belfry behind the elms. What silence brooded over the summer night!—silence that, if you listened, you found to be not silence at all, but a thing made up of rustlings and tiny noises innumerable—a dew-drop falling from a leaf, insects droning, a twig cracking under the weight of a roosting bird, a breeze sighing in the wood, a distant murmur of the brook, a field-mouse busy in the darkness, these and a million other sounds gave the subtle speech that passed for muteness in the sleeping world. Gertrude remembered another night as fair as

this. Had Knutsford cared as she cared now? She thought of his letter and of how small a pang it had cost her to answer it. Even her aunt had thought her heartless. And then she thought of Robin Wakefield, the boy with whom she had fancied herself in love. What was he doing in India? He had said he should never forget her, and in a week she had been reconciled to his absence. After that she thought of Harwood. He could not be said to have felt her refusal very deeply, and she passed on to Brabant and remembered his restless eyes. Did he, too, care as she now cared? Would it not be but just that she should suffer, as others through her had suffered? Might it not fairly be in store for her that that on which she had set her heart would be taken away from her?

"Not France," she said, half aloud — "oh, not France!"

She sank to her knees and rested her head on the white wood of the window-sill. She clasped her hands to her forehead.

"Oh, my God!" she said, "don't take him from me. Give him to me — give him to me, and I will serve you all the days of my life. I love him—I love him. Oh, give him to me—give him to me. I could not spare him now. . . ."

Gertrude's tears fell fast. A voice seemed with insistence to whisper of justice and retribution. She clasped her hands yet tighter.

"Not France," she said again — "not France. If I must suffer for not having suffered yet — though why? why?—if I must, let it be in some other way. Give me France. I love him—I loved him the day I saw

him, the minute I saw him, I think, and even before that, for I heard his voice as I can hear it now, and—oh, I love him!"

Out of the night there came no answer. The moon had fallen lower. The tops of the trees in the wood showed a tinge of silver. A little gust of the breeze brought up a stronger fragrance from the garden.

"I would rather that he died or I than that we should be separated. He did not lose his friend when the friend died. The friend is an ever-present memory, and is nearer to him than I could be. And the friend did not lose him. Oh, I could die—I could die if he would remember me so!"

"I was horrible about the song," she thought presently, when her vehemence was spent—"horrible, for I grudged the friend his memory, and the friend is dead. And France gave in—oh, I hope he knew that I was sorry. I don't hate the friend for having been so much to him. I like him for France's sake, and yet I was horrible. Oh France, France, France, how happy I am and how miserable!"

She raised her head after a time and looked out of the casement. The tears glistened on her face. She grew calm as the tranquil night, and presently marvelled at her recent excitement. Again and again she lived through the events of the day. She lingered in thought over every word he had said to her. She could see him now as he had looked when he sat in the shadow of the house, while his supple fingers moved on the strings of the banjo and he sang. With a smile she remembered what a harsh and terrible instrument the banjo could be even in hands dear to her as those of

her brother, and she laughed as she thought of the day when Lady Julia, driven to the limit of her patience, had told him to take it up to the attic or out into the garden, if he did not wish her to destroy it with her own hands and a pair of strong scissors. Henry was good-tempered as he was indolent, and had suffered himself to be persuaded to drop the noisy amusement altogether. With France there had been no noise. The notes he drew from the strings were sweet as those of a lute, or else a glamour was thrown over Gertrude's senses.

How good it had been to see him sitting opposite to her at luncheon—better, better far, than if he had been instead at the dinner-party of the night before. In this, Fate could not have been kinder. He had been spared Lady Julia's intended slight—a slight, however, which Gertrude knew had been designed far more for her own interpretation than from any wish on her aunt's part to insult Woodford personally. Whatever Lady Julia's aim may have been, her shot had missed fire.

Something fell in the garden—a cone from a fir. A startled bird gave a cry and sought another perch. A star shot across the sky. The moon sank lower.

Gertrude's heart beat now less loudly. She was kneeling still by the window, her arms were on the sill, her chin resting on her hands. What a beautiful world was that on which she was looking! The sky was infinitely high. The distance of the stars and their brightness and their incalculable number filled her with awe. She wished she knew their names. Another point of light sped like a stone from a sling across the

blue and dropped behind the hills. Some words that France had spoken recurred to her for the thousandth time. He had said to her that she was kind to him—too kind, perhaps, for his happiness. What did he mean? She heard the low voice in which the words were spoken. She remembered the tense silence that followed. Neither seemed able to break it. And then? —then a clock struck, and a sound of which Gertrude had been conscious, though it passed unheeded, had preceded the appearance of her aunt.

The sleeves had fallen back from Gertrude's arms. There was still a tiny mark on her wrist where the lash of Brabant's whip had struck her. To a symbolist the cut might have seemed significant in the light of events that were to follow. To Gertrude the streak of red represented an incident forgiven long since.

Was the night changing? The breeze that had been cool was chill, and Gertrude shivered. She put her hand upon her shoulder, and the flesh that was smooth as satin to her touch was cold as marble.

She closed the window, and went back to bed.

CHAPTER XIV.

Gertrude was not the only person at Eastwood to whom sleep came late that August night.

Lady Julia sought rest and did not find it. The moon and the stars brought little peace to her, however, for her blinds were down and her curtains drawn, besides which she was not of the type of person who finds

consolation for the worries of humanity in a contemplation of the beauties of nature. She, too, was thinking over the events of the day.

When she left her niece that morning, Lady Julia drove straight to Parkhurst. The weather, as we know, was fair. The horses were fresh, and the carriage rolled smoothly over the well-kept roads. Mrs. Peck of Peckham came to the door to make her courtesy and her observations.

"What was that telegram about as we sent up to the house this morning?" she inquired of her husband.

"It was from Lord St. Pancras, telling her to meet him at Parkhurst Station where he was passing through."

"Well, that's where she's gone, then," said Mrs. Peck, satisfied. "That's her second-best bonnet—that with the violets as she's wearing. Her new one for church has roses."

Peck professed his interest.

"Miss Gertrude don't marry," commented his wife, presently. "She seems to hang on somehow, don't she?—it's having too many strings to her bow, that's what spoils the broth."

Mrs. Peck's metaphors were as mixed as her biscuits. The carriage was out of sight, and she returned to her postal and maternal duties. She nursed the baby in the intervals between the selling of stamps and the weighing of letters. A sound of hoofs brought her again to the door.

"There goes Mr. Woodford," she announced; then, turning her head: "he's just come up the lane—Harwood way, and I b'lieve he's going to Eastwood. He wasn't at the party last night. I heard that from Mrs.

Brown's Ellen as went up to help in the kitchen. I hear him and Miss Maxwell's very thick. If he'd take my advice he'd go away before he burns his fingers. He'd never do, y' know. Lady J., she's looking out for position or rank. She favors Mr. Harwood, I hear; but Miss Gertrude 'll scarcely look at him. Yes, he's gone up towards Eastwood. I s'pose he's gone to tell 'em about the accident. But he might just as well stop away. Her ladyship 'd never give her consent, for all he's so good looking. They've no money, them Woodfords."

The carriage rolled on towards Parkhurst. It is noteworthy—as a proof of Mrs. Peck's power of reading character—that Lady Julia's thoughts ran in the exact channels to which the postmistress had been assigning them. The Woodfords had pedigree and few acres, and France had better go his way. Gertrude's beauty and her attractions were of small use if the wrong men were forever to fall in love with her. What a goose the girl was not to have accepted Mr. Harwood—a man she could have twisted round her little finger! She would then have been mistress of one of the most beautiful places in the county, and of her husband into the bargain! What more ought a young woman to want? Gertrude was twenty-five. Something must be done.

As the carriage passed the Manor gates Lady Julia looked up the drive. The old house was very picturesque. Its whites and blacks were dominant in the sunlight. A wing had fallen into disrepair, and was unoccupied. The establishment was meagre, and Mrs. Woodford had to lead a quiet life consistent with her limited means. At her death her nephew would inherit the place and its impoverished income. It would be

cruel to Gertrude to allow her to take a leap in the dark. She was accustomed to luxury, and though she had money of her own, and young Mr. Woodford—so Lady Julia understood—had enough for his wants, still, a marriage was out of the question. Lady Julia's duty was clear.

A look of satisfaction and complacence settled upon her face as she lay back in her cushions. Life rolled as smoothly for Lady Julia as the wheels of her carriage. Everything about her was comfortable and well appointed. She knew none of the sordid inconvenience that springs from lack of means. She had never known it. Gertrude was in a like case. How could she live without horses and men-servants and maid-servants and pretty frocks and so on? It would be impossible. Lady Julia's duty was clear.

The train was not due for five minutes when the station was reached. Lady Julia, having ascertained the length of its stop at Parkhurst to be an hour and a half, determined that there would be time to lunch in the town. Accordingly, she sent the footman down to the Sceptre with her orders and waited for the train. When she heard it in the distance she went out onto the platform.

Lord St. Pancras waved his hand to her from a window.

"Here I am, Julia. How are you? You're growing fat. Shall I get out or will you come in here? I don't advise it—the heat and dust are intolerable."

"I have ordered lunch at the Sceptre. I have the carriage outside. You stay here an hour and a half, so we need not be hurried."

"You're a thoughtful woman. Oh, my gout! Where's my man? Oh, there you are. James, look after my things."

The old man limped from the train to the carriage.

"Oh, my d——d foot! It came on the day before yesterday, and I am crippled. How's Gertrude? Oh-h-h-h—Don't mind me. There, now I'm all right."

"Poor fellow!" said Lady Julia, with compassion. "I know what it is. And Betty—where is Betty?"

"Still at Cowes. I left a week ago, and am on my way from the Loudons. The duchess was charmed with Wilfrid Graham. She saw a lot of him in town, and if you're not careful she'll marry him to whatever girl she happens to be running."

"Careful!" said Lady Julia, "the thing is more in your hands than mine. I am waiting for you to arrange something."

"Well, that's what we're going to talk about. Is this the place?—looks like a public house."

"My dear St. Pancras, our best hotel!"

"Now I have got to get out, haven't I? Oh, my foot! Jump out and go in, then you won't hear me swear—oh, d——! No, the other arm. There. Oh-h-h. There. Thank ye."

He hobbled up the steps and into the house. Lady Julia with the wine-list asked him what he was allowed to drink.

"Everything, bless you. I don't nurse myself. I am not going to let my strength run down to please the doctors. Am I to sit here? Oh-h-h."

Luncheon was quickly served in the coffee-room, and the waiter withdrew.

"Well—now?" said Lady Julia. "Let us begin at the beginning. Has Mr. Graham been told of Gertrude?"

"He had heard of her—yes. You may trust Lady St. Pancras for a match-maker as you would trust yourself."

"And?"

"And he thinks it reasonable that as my heir I should wish him to marry."

"So far so good," said Lady Julia.

"And that's just about as far as it does go at present. Remember, Julia, I have no authority with my nephew. He has plenty of money, and if he liked he could snap his fingers in my face. If he lives he succeeds to my earldom. I can't prevent that. Dear Betty, you know, is like Sarah when she laughed—well, not quite ninety, perhaps, but still we don't expect a son! Wilfrid is then his own master, but I repeat he thinks it reasonable that I should wish him to marry, and—he has heard of Miss Maxwell."

"Then what do you propose?"

"It is he who must do that," said the old man, chuckling.

Lady Julia was impatient, but she thought it politic to smile.

"What are his engagements?"

"Lord! how should I know? Oh, my foot! He may be going up to the Hurlinghams, in Scotland, when he leaves Cowes. I know Lady Hurlingham asked him. She has a daughter—"

"You are teasing me, St. Pancras. I know Miss Runton slightly. Gertrude could afford to have her as a

rival. Don't make difficulties. I expect plenty with Gertrude herself. I am very much afraid she is more than half in love with some one at this moment."

"Gertrude in love!" said Lord St. Pancras, with another chuckle. "That's not like Gertrude."

"It isn't like the girl who used to be your ward, is it?" said Lady Julia, "but Gertrude is changing. I am not as certain that I know her as I was."

"Who is the man?"

"Young Woodford."

"Who's he?"

"You remember Mrs. Woodford, at the Manor? You dined there, I think? He is her nephew. He is, unfortunately, very nice, and a fine, handsome fellow, and every one likes him. I like him myself, though I don't suppose he or Gertrude think so. He has been ranching somewhere. However, all this is neither here or there, and if Gertrude has been so foolish as to—to interest herself in him, she will have to forget him."

"Just so," said Lord St. Pancras, ironically. "She was always amenable, wasn't she?" he added.

"She was always sensible," said Lady Julia—"if one took her the right way. If I see no other course, I shall take matters into my own hands."

"Which means?"

"No matter. We mustn't waste time. Let me give you some more chicken. Will Mr. Graham come to us?"

"I think so. I can almost promise for him. I have spoken of it."

"And you and Betty?"

"If you like."

"It would look better, as I don't know the young man."

Lord St. Pancras laughed.

"And you will use your influence?"

"I tell you I have none—really. But you can rest assured that I should be as glad if this marriage came about as you. I think Gertrude is just the wife for him. But look here, Julia, I am no longer her guardian, I know; but I won't have her heart broken about this other man, do you hear? I don't remember that she had a heart of the breakable order, but if she has, we mustn't make her unhappy by our scheming. Time was, Julia, when you came to me and told me that you wished to die, because they would not let you marry poor Charlie Harman. You've forgotten all about it now; he never did, poor boy!"

"Have I?" said Lady Julia; "have I? Poor Charlie! I have not, but I have lived long enough to know who was right—my mother or I."

"And Gertrude is to buy wisdom?"

"If she is out of it."

Soon after this Lady Julia took her cousin back to the station. It was satisfactorily arranged that Wilfrid Graham was to be brought to Eastwood in September. Had there been no such person as France Woodford, it might all have been plain sailing. On every side Lady Julia had heard of Mr. Graham—his looks, his manner. It would not have been too much to hope that Gertrude would like him. From what Lord St. Pancras said, Mr. Graham himself was not averse to the proposed alliance, and all men were attracted to Miss Maxwell. How smoothly things might have gone. She must trust to

the girl's sense. Surely Gertrude would not sacrifice her prospects to her heart. The connection proposed for her was sufficiently brilliant. As the future Lady St. Pancras, she might think herself lucky. What if her affections were seriously engaged? Lady Julia thought of her own case, of the tears she had shed, and the void that had ached in her heart. Poor Charlie Harman! He went to the devil, and died the year that made her a Maxwell. That was thirty-two—thirty-three—no, thirty-four years ago. She had outlived her sorrow, and she could not think that her life was a failure. Her mother had acted wisely, and she would be as wise.

Judging from precedent, did Gertrude feel deeply? Supposing that she had really grown fond of this young man from the ranch, would not her disappointment soon fade? Graham had everything that Woodford had not, as well as everything that he had. If only there had been no Woodford! It was with this last thought uppermost in her mind that Lady Julia drove back to Eastwood. What wonder that that night she could not sleep? He had been there the greater part of the day she learned. She did not question Gertrude, who, indeed, told her frankly of the invitation to lunch. The bright eyes and the fleeting color seemed to Lady Julia to tell their own story. What wonder that that night she could not sleep?

CHAPTER XV.

Neither did Woodford sleep that night. It was dawn almost before he went to bed, though he withdrew early from the drawing-room. It was not easy to be abstracted in the presence of his aunt. She was a good and stupid little woman, who, by way of making herself agreeable, talked incessantly upon nothing in particular, and expected answers. If she said, "What a fine evening!" or "There's a hole in that antimacassar," or "Pussy's asking for her saucer of milk," you must reply. If you did not at once, she would add a question, "Don't you think so?" or "Isn't there?" or "Do you see?" as the case might be. It was wiser to answer at once. She told anecdotes, too, which were heralded by a trite little observation in this manner: "It is extraordinary how much luckier some people are than others. I remember some years ago—" and the rest; "In the midst of life we are in death. How true that is. I sometimes think we know very little of what is before us. When your uncle died—" and so on.

France did his best to be attentive, but on this particular evening he found it almost impossible. Mrs. Woodford was more than usually brilliant. She told him all that she would have liked to do had she been rich. It would be nice to be rich, wouldn't it? Though it was better to be content, wasn't it? And she thought that, on the whole, she was not dissatisfied with her lot; did he think that she was? Perhaps if she had had money,

she would have wished for more—there must always be a state that was more enviable than another state, eh? And why was he so silent?

France would not say. He would take a walk before turning in. Yes, the air would do him good—would he take a latch-key? What convenient things they were to be sure! Mrs. Woodford did not know what would be done without them.

France drew a sigh of relief as the door closed between him and his aunt. The moon hung behind the house, and a deep shadow was on the drive. His cigar made a moving-point of fire in the darkness. He emerged presently into the light of the stars. What a night, he thought, what a night! The incalculable number of the worlds he saw and the unfathomable mystery of the heavens filled him with an awful wonder. How still was the night! He heard a sheep-bell from a distant field, and as he neared the bridge he heard the song of the brook. He went and leaned over the wall. Sticks, reeds, and all the flotsam and jetsam collected by the stream in its course lay flat as a raft on the surface where the grating filtered the water before it passed through the little lake in the Manor grounds. A whirlpool at the outskirts of the floating scum of rubbish told of the current below. France thought of his wooden letter. Had he known it, there were scraps of stick each charged with a message to himself even now rotting in the water.

He swung himself down from the drive to the bank, and walked up-stream.

The house disappeared behind the trees. The brook ran through meadows where willows bent over the water.

Cows turned their heads and followed France with sleepy eyes. An old horse in a field walked after him slowly to the fence which formed a boundary. France found gaps or gates in the hedges. The grasses rustled as he passed, and field-mice were still till his retreating footsteps told them of safety. He took no heed of time. His head felt unsteady, and he tried to affix a just meaning to the events of the day. The direction of his course indicated that of his thoughts. The stream led past the outskirts of a wood where the breeze sighed among the leaves. A broken branch creaked as it gently swung, and in the shadow its shapeless darkness was suggestive of a body strung up to the arm of a gallows. Murmurings and noises scarcely audible came from the recesses of the wood. A glow-worm made a spark of flame upon a tuft of grass. Leaving the shadow of the trees, Woodford came to a marshy patch of ground. The mud under foot gave out an oozing sound where the sun by day had not baked it to brick. Little ponds of water reflected the stars. The atmosphere over the marsh was damp and chill. There was a perceptible change when he left it behind. An owl hooted—the same owl, possibly, which Gertrude saw. Now the square tower of the church rose above the trees, and presently the white top of Eastwood showed itself. He reached at length the spot where Gertrude and he had met, and there he stopped. He remembered every word she had said to him, he remembered every look she had bestowed upon him. He could see the sunlight in her eyes and on her hair, and emphasizing the beautiful lines of her figure. He could hear her voice and the accent that stamped her breeding—the

accent contrasted with which other women's mode of speech seemed vulgar and provincial. Then he thought of the afternoon at the Manor.

The owl was restless, and flew by. Unconsciously France left the stream, and before he had realized his intention he was in the park. A star shot across the sky — one of the stars, perhaps, that Gertrude saw. Eastwood was hidden for the time behind the trees; then a few more steps brought its white pile into full view. France fell back for a moment like a poacher or a thief. The minutes passed. No human sound broke the stillness. He moved into the shadow and entered the garden. There was the rose-tree whence Gertrude had cut the flower he wore. There was the terrace where they two had sat. The chairs had not been moved. The wicker-table stood in its place, and on it something dark. What? A book, perhaps; yes, he remembered she had held a book. She had forgotten it.

Which was her window, he wondered; that, or that, or that? One was open, and the roses hung heavily below it. Suddenly his pulses leaped. A movement was made in the casement at which he was looking, and a white-robed figure rose, possibly from a kneeling posture. As soon as his eyes grew accustomed to the framed picture he decided that the girl was kneeling still. She had raised her head from the sill. The face looked very white in the starlight, and the eyes were indicated by dark shadows. He saw the white arms, too, from which the draperies had fallen. Behind was the vague blackness of the room. All was shadowy and uncertain; but he was sure that it was Gertrude. His heart was beating

loudly, and he scarcely dared to breathe. He started when the cone fell from a neighboring fir, and the bird gave its frightened cry. The face at the window turned in the direction of the sound. Possibly so it caught a fuller light, or it may be that France's sight was growing keener. He thought he saw the shining of Gertrude's eyes. He would have moved nearer, but he feared being seen. How very still she was! She seemed to be looking in the direction whence he had come. Did she hear the brook? He heard it. It filled him once more with memories.

What were her thoughts? Some words that she had spoken about Bruff and himself recurred to him. He remembered the tears that had stood in her eyes when she ceased speaking. What did it all mean, he asked himself, if not the one great thing that he scarcely dared to hope? . . .

She moved again. A fear came on him that she was going. She must not go! But she had only changed her position. She was looking at the sky. He looked up too. If possible there seemed more stars than before. How near she was to him! He could have spoken without raising his voice and she would have heard him. That cloudy blackness round her was in part her hair. How long had she been there? If only he had known he might have made more haste. He thought of the time he had wasted, stopping, as he had sometimes stopped, to look at the view or to listen to some louder bubble of the brook.

He was so near to her! He scarcely thought that she could have been so near to him, although unseen by him, without his knowledge. His eyes were on her face. He

was in the shadow of the trees. There was no magnetism to draw her eyes to his, or else, all hidden though he was, she must have felt his presence. He whispered her name below his breath.

The breeze grew cooler. A cow, from which the calf had been taken, lowed mournfully, and woke a distant echo in the hills. The grass was wet with dew. Here and there a drop of moisture sparkled. That he might escape observation France had knelt on one knee under a hawthorn-tree, and his position grew cramped. His arm was round the slender trunk. His legs ached, but he would not move lest he should make a sound. He scarcely, indeed, knew his discomfort fully.

"Gertrude," he said to himself; "Gertrude, Gertrude!"

Like the stab of a knife there came to him the recollection of some words that were spoken to him on the night when he had first seen her:

"If you admire her, let me warn you. Either she will not condescend to take the smallest notice of you, or else she will set herself to make you miserable. She has about as much heart as a statue."

If this were true, then was her attitude towards him explained. Her kindness to him was but a bait to lure him to his destruction. Every look was a net, every word a mesh in which to trap him. He would not believe it, and he thought of the words she had spoken to him by the stream:

"Are you going to be warned by what you have been told, or are you going to be my friend?"

The words made no denial of the implication of an enemy. She trusted to his perception to judge her fairly.

The lips he had learned to know, and the eyes that had met his so steadfastly, could not lie.

If only he could see more clearly now; if he did but dare to show himself, to breathe her name aloud, and tell her of the love that consumed him! The glamour of the summer night robbed his senses of their balance.

A movement at the window arrested his attention. Gertrude had risen to her feet, and he knew that she was going. If all the force of his will could have kept her at her place, then would she have stayed. He saw her more clearly as she stood and took a last look at the starlit landscape. Something that she did before she closed the window caused him to start to his feet. He saw her put her hands to her lips and throw out her arms in a gesture of supreme self-abandonment.

Not till he stood on the lawn in the full light of stars and the moon did he realize that he had left the shelter of the trees. For a moment there had come to him a wild fancy that she had seen him, that she had read his thoughts. His reason told him it was impossible. To whatever cause her action might be attributed, it was not to a knowledge of his presence. She had believed herself alone, and he had been a witness to—what?

A clock struck and startled him. His figure cast a black shadow on the grass. He must not stay here on the open lawn where he might be seen. But he could not tear himself away; the vision was so recent, he felt it might return. He looked up at the house; the windows were all dark; a bat flitted round him.

His eye fell again on the wicker-chairs and on the book that lay upon the table. He walked noiselessly to the spot. The cover of the book was wet with

dew; the stem of an open rose marked a page. He gently raised the volume and the rose fell out. He picked it up and held it to his lips. He looked about for some other flower to put in its place. Another rose lay on the ground—a yellow rose, and that which he wished to take was red. He thought that he should like to leave some record of his midnight visit. He substituted the one for the other. He did not see that the rose which she had given to him, and which he had been wearing in his coat, was no longer there, and that the yellow flower which he left in the book was tied with a golden thread.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SUNBEAM fell on Gertrude's face. There was a rosy flush upon her cheeks that told of her vigorous health. The dazzling white of the bed threw out her coloring — the red of her lips, the brown of the even lashes, the pink of her small ears, the rich autumn tints of her hair. Her breathing was regular, the coverlet rising and falling with her bosom. She drew a deeper breath and moved her position. Then the sun shone fully on the white lids.

She opened her eyes and lay still.

The room was bright with the early light. The pale blue of the walls and the chintzes looked fresh and cool. The sun played on the silver and glass of the dressing-table, and onto the ceiling were shot prismatic reflections. A mirror gave out the rays of a counterfeit

sun; a steel buckle vied with it in rivalry. The cut stopper of a scent-bottle blazed as with inner fires. An imprisoned bee was buzzing round a bowl of mignonette. Gertrude's eyes wandered to the window.

The curtains were drawn back as she had left them. The cloudless night had given place to cloudless day. The sky was vividly blue. She could see the green of a tree on the lawn, and, above, nothing but the measureless expanse of the heavens. Swallows circled round the house. In the garden birds were singing from every bush.

Beside the bed on a little table stood a vase holding the rose which France had plucked for her on the preceding day. Gertrude's eyes rested on it, and she took it tenderly from the water and breathed in its scent. Her lips formed a smile as she looked at it—such a smile as told of the soul that had been awakened within her. The fears of the night had passed with the darkness. She was young, she loved, and life was before her. And life was beautiful, and beautiful the world!

The clock over the stable played its tune and struck six. She could not wait till her maid came to call her at eight. The water in the bath, which she could see from her bed, tempted her as it glistened in the sunlight. She rose and threw the windows open.

Half an hour later, clad in a light cotton dress, that gave free play to her lithe form, and with her hair twisted thickly at the back of her head, she descended from her room. The servants were astir. Some mats lay on the hall table. The drawing-room door stood open, and a house-maid was leisurely dusting the furniture. Parker came out of the dining-room in his shirt-

sleeves. He was calling some direction to one of the under-servants, and he broke off and stood aside to let his young mistress pass. The hall door was fastened back, and one of the dogs lay on the mat. It's tail beat upon the floor as Gertrude went by.

The garden basked in the sunlight. One of the gardeners was singing over his work. A blackbird ran across the lawn, and a robin stood perched on one of the tennis poles. The cat lay curled on a rug in front of the dining-room window. The air hummed as ever with insect life. Behind the house the woods rose in many shades of green, the leaves looking light and feathery. Gertrude heard the soft cooing of pigeons and the gentle murmur of the brook. She looked at her watch. It was not yet seven, and two hours must elapse before breakfast. She would have time to climb up through the shrubberies to the cool shadows of the trees. She returned to the house for a hat. There was a pleasant smell in the hall of the coffee that was being prepared for the servants, and the fragrance gave an edge to her appetite. She would eat something before she went out.

Parker appeared in answer to her ring.

"Is there any coffee ready?" she asked.

Parker thought that there was. In any case, it would be ready in a few minutes. Then she would have a small cup of it and some bread-and-butter—here, on a corner of the dining-room table.

It was not many minutes before the man reappeared bearing a tray, on which stood a steaming cup that filled the air with its scent, and a roll and some butter. No elaborate meal had ever seemed more excellent.

As Gertrude put down her empty cup, her eyes fell upon a gap in the book-case that faced her. She would take a book up into the woods. She would take the volume of Tennyson containing "In Memoriam." She went over and looked along the shelves. The gap that marked a missing volume reminded her of where that volume was. She had been reading it out upon the terrace, and unless one of the servants had brought it in, it must have lain out of doors all night. She found it presently where she had left it. The dew had dried from the cover, and the binding was a little stained. A flower marked a page. She took the book just as it was, and put it under her arm. She walked round to the back of the house, passing through the stable-yard, where a groom was washing a carriage. He paused in his work and answered some inquiry of Gertrude's anent her mare. The dogs greeted her with delight. A jingling came from the harness-room.

Gertrude stepped through the little door cut in the great gate, and, crossing the road that led round the house, she went up through the shrubberies towards the woods. At each fresh stage in her ascent she stopped to admire the view. The whole landscape seemed to smile in the sunlight. The air was again so clear that miles were robbed of half their length. Distance seemed near. When Gertrude reached the woods she could see the red roofs of Parkhurst and the stream like a silver thread running through the meadows. A few feet higher showed her a glimpse of the whites and blacks of the gabled Manor. Then Gertrude sat down on a fallen trunk.

Soft mosses covered the ground, and little flowers

flecked the green with other colors. A bunch of unripe nuts hung over her head. A silver birch gleamed where the light falling through a thick canopy of leaves struck its white bark. A woodpecker tapped a young larch. In the branches the birds held a very revel. Gertrude listened for the sound of the brook, but from her place she could not hear it. A gorgeous fungus ranged in orange-colored shelves grew at the foot of an old tree.

Gertrude put down her book beside her. The rose still marked the place where, after France left her on the preceding afternoon, she had begun and ceased to read.

Was France up and out as she herself? How often she thought of him! She wondered whether the events of the day before had robbed his eyes of sleep as they had robbed her own?

She could smile now at the misgivings of the night. Why should he be taken from her? Life is unfair, and she had the best of it. We have, or we have not. A sorrow is not meted out for every joy.

Down below in the valley she could see a wagon lumbering along the Parkhurst road. She heard a faint rumble of the wheels. Now the sun caught a gilded vane on the Manor, and it flashed like a golden flame.

France, France, France, everything said France, and Gertrude saw the world with new eyes. She did not allow herself to think of the future, of Lady Julia, of her brother Henry. She knew full well what would be the attitude of her relations if there was offered to her that which she most desired. Henry was only a couple of years her senior, and she did not suppose that there

would be any insuperable difficulty in bringing him over from the enemy. He would argue with her a little, he would bring into requisition such sarcasm as he could command, he would be angry, he would tell her that she was not doing what she owed to her family, and, finally, he would relent. Lady Julia would never relent. That would be a pity, of course, but it could not be helped. In any case, Gertrude did not intend to let possible difficulties trouble her. She opened her book, but she found it an effort to fix her attention. A fly alighted on the page. The gleaming white of the paper in the sun dazzled her eyes. A lady-bird made a moving point of red upon the lines she was trying to read. It opened its wings and flew away. Its place was immediately taken by a gnat. Gertrude blew it off, and it returned. It was joined by a little white moth, which ran to and fro.

Then the Manor once more arrested her attention; then the light on the hills; then another wagon on the road; then a little snake that glided away from somewhere near her feet and startled her. After that the church clock struck eight, and she counted the strokes. When she returned to her book, she found that the breeze was playing with the pages, and her place was lost. The rose had slipped from the volume, and lay upon her dress. She had been looking at it abstractedly for some moments, when it seemed to her of a sudden that it had changed color. It was a yellow rose by all that was wonderful, and the rose that she had left yesterday to mark her page was red. Red—she was sure of it. She remembered where she had plucked it; it had grown on the side of the house. It was after France

left that she had been reading, and, the dressing-bell ringing, she had looked about for something to keep her place. The wall was just behind her, and thence she had picked the flower — a red flower, she was certain of it. With pondering eyes she continued to gaze at the yellow rose. There was something familiar about it; it reminded her of France. Why France? It was faded a little, and the petals drooped. What was that silken thread that shone round the stem?

She knew then. It was the rose she had given to him. Then how in the name of all that was extraordinary did it come into her possession now? She looked at it as if by looking she would wring its secret from it. The dumbness of the flower seemed to throw her back upon herself. It lay on her knee. Its stem was limp, and no longer supported the languid head. Had her flower changed to his in some hidden way through her very thought of him, as the loaves in the lap of St. Elizabeth of Hungary changed to roses. She smiled at her own bewilderment, and doubted the testimony of her eyes. There might have been some misapprehension about the color, but the presence of the thread of silk that was bound round the leaf and the stalk proved beyond doubt that this was Woodford's very rose. Where then was the red rose which she herself had placed between the leaves? The mystery baffled her, and, like all things unexplained, it made her vaguely uncomfortable. Her rose had been returned to her like the money to the sacks of Joseph's brethren.

Her thoughts wandered back to the starlit night. Could it be that he had come back? — had been near to her, perhaps, when she had knelt at the window? A

color spread itself over Gertrude's face as she thought on. What meaning, save one, could there be to his midnight visit to Eastwood? She began to wonder, even, whether she had not unconsciously divined his presence or his approach. She remembered the suffocating beating of her heart, the alertness of every sense. It was easy to persuade herself that her inner being had been sensible of his nearness, and that only the fetters of her body had held back her unquiet spirit from a complete knowledge. The thought set her pulses throbbing even now. When had he come to her? Where had he stood when she was at the window? Had he seen her? The moon was in her first quarter, but she gave a certain light, and the sky had been ablaze with stars.

So he had been there! What wonder that she could not sleep, that every nerve had been tense? Had not the night breathed his name—France? was it not written for her on every leaf and flower?

A field that Gertrude could see from her elevated position was dotted thickly with black and moving spots. The rooks were busy with their search for a morning meal. They rose in a dark cloud, once at the approach of a sheep-dog, and again when a laborer passed along the path. Gertrude heard their distant cawing as each time they settled down anew.

If only the rose could tell its message! What is your secret, little rose? One by one the events of the night ranged themselves before her. She realized again the frame of mind in which she had prayed that he might not be taken from her. She thought then of the peace that had been communicated to her by the tranquillity of the heavens. Her memories culminated in a recol-

lection that caused her eyes to fall, and the color once more to deepen in her cheeks. Had he been there when, before closing her window, she had thrown out her arms in the direction of the Manor?

He had left the rose to tell her of his presence, or else it had some subtler meaning. Suddenly, as she looked at its fading petals, there came to her a deadly fear. It was her own rose that had come back to her—the rose which she had given to him. It had been returned to her. What a hideous thought! She had shown him too clearly the thoughts of her heart, and this was his answer.

She tried to laugh at her folly. Some day, perhaps, she would tell him these fears of hers, and he would laugh too. But why her rose? Why? Any other would have told her of his presence. Perhaps he had thought this one only would serve to identify him, and in any case he had taken one in exchange. But that was not the same thing. This rose must have a closer association, and yet he had parted with it.

Gertrude shivered. What an ugly message she had read in the dying flower! She laughed again.

CHAPTER XVII.

Afterwards Gertrude wondered that she guessed nothing from Lady Julia's manner. It is so easy to be wise after the event. At the time, possibly, the girl was too much occupied with her own thoughts to study the demeanor of her aunt.

A long letter that was written by Lady Julia and despatched to some neighboring destination by special messenger attracted no attention upon Gertrude's part, even though happening to disturb her aunt in the writing of it. She saw Lady Julia hastily put it out of sight, and evince some slight embarrassment. This took place on the morning of Gertrude's early rising and her visit to the woods.

On the following day Lady Julia and Miss Maxwell were engaged to lunch with the Hattons, and at the last moment Lady Julia developed such a headache that she was unable to go, and her niece was fain to set out alone. Gertrude was depressed. She had not seen France, and she could not shake off the uncomfortable feeling which the return of her rose with its supposed symbolism had left upon her. At the Hattons' she learned that the concert of the Parkhurst Habitation of the Primrose League had been postponed from its date, a few days distant, to a fortnight later. Gertrude had been counting upon meeting France as a certainty upon the evening of the entertainment in question, and the alteration of the day was a disappointment to her.

Mrs. Hatton's hospitality was of that mistaken kind which insists on detaining a guest beyond the limits of the accepted invitation. Gertrude yielded to importunity and remained to tea. She had no particular reason for wishing to return home, but during the hours of the afternoon she was in a very fever of impatience, which good breeding compelled her to conceal, for the moment of her departure to arrive. Even when five o'clock struck Mrs. Hatton had a hundred reasons why Miss Maxwell should stay till six. The mare was being fed,

the groom must not be disturbed at his tea, Gertrude must see the new tennis-court, and she had not written her name in Ethel's birthday-book, and would not she just play over the piece for which she had been put down in the programme? Did Gertrude think it mattered that the wrong date should remain on the programmes? It would be so expensive to have them all reprinted. No, Gertrude did not think it mattered at all, and now might she ask for the trap? No. Mrs. Hatton really must insist. Would not Gertrude have half a cup more? nor a pear? nor some grapes? Well, if she really could not stop, of course—

Then Gertrude made her escape. She turned sharply out of the lodge gates and drove fast in the direction of Eastwood, urged forward by some force which seemed outside herself. Her life might have depended upon her reaching home in the shortest possible time. The mare set back her ears at the unaccustomed touch of the whip, and the groom's face wore an expression of mild surprise.

"Most in generally," he said to himself, "Miss Maxwell's such a steady driver."

She did not know what ailed her. Her hands were trembling. Hedges, gates, a cottage, the shrubs in a plantation, whirled past her as she drove. A flake of foam blew back from the animal's mouth. It made a splash of white upon the chestnut flank. It seemed to Gertrude a mute protest, which she did not heed. Now before going down the hill the Parkhurst road could be seen. A solitary horseman disappeared in the distance. Once in the park, Gertrude slackened the pace. The groom jumped down to open the last gate and hurried

on to the steps as his mistress walked the mare up the drive. The sight of her home did not steady the girl's nerves. She patted the mare's head and praised her powers.

The groom's face still wore an expression of surprise. Gertrude found him watching her.

"She went well that last two miles, 'm," he said, respectfully.

Gertrude said, "Yes, Bates," and went into the house. Even now she was trembling. There awaited her she knew not what. She could not have told her reasons, but, none the less, she felt that dire news was in store for her. She was on the verge of some crisis in her life. For her there had come one of those open moments when the veil that hides the future seems about to be drawn. She tried to laugh as she had tried to laugh before, but the gloom engendered by the sense of impending disaster was too dense to shake off. She leaned for a moment against the lintel of the door and closed her eyes. Her face had grown deadly pale, and the fever of impatience that had urged her forward now left her weak and with limbs that refused their office. With a deep indrawn breath she opened her eyes. The great square hall was empty. There was nothing to inspire fear in what was before her. The polished floor shone with beeswax where it was not hidden by rugs and skins. The pictures looked down from russet walls. She was familiar with the suits of armor; their tenantless shapes were no longer grim.

With a great effort Gertrude regained the mastery of herself. She had never been hysterical. She had, indeed, the contempt for those who were that comes

of an inability to grasp an unknown state. She had always been strong, healthy, self-reliant. She was not of the morbid order, and her sudden weakness shocked her as one is shocked by some symptom that may tell of latent disease. A card lay on the hall table. Almost before she read it she knew what would be written upon it. Through the mist she saw France Woodford's name, and just below, in pencil, the ominous letters "P.P.C."

There seemed to come a long pause, during which time itself was stayed. Then very slowly Gertrude went to the drawing-room. The room was empty. The windows to the garden were open wide. Lady Julia's canaries were singing shrilly, and their yellow looked crude and vulgar. Tea still stood upon the table by the sofa. Two cups had been used, and one was full. There was a chair drawn up near that side of the table where was the cup the contents of which had not been tasted.

Gertrude looked at all these things inanimate, and strove to read their story as she had striven to read that of the rose. They told the same tale, she said to herself. France was gone—that was the meaning of the one. France was gone, and all was at an end—that was the cruel message of the other.

Tears rose to Gertrude's eyes, but did not fall. She saw the room mistily. How shrill beyond endurance was the singing of the canaries! She put her hands to her ears to shut out the sound. It was maddening. She could not think. She went over and pulled down the blind of the window near which the cage was standing. The comparative gloom subdued the exuberance of

the song. Then she returned to her place by the table. There on the sofa Lady Julia had sat, and had been gracious, probably, as Mr. Woodford was leaving the neighborhood. Here on this low chair France must have been sitting. That was his cup, then, the full cup. He had not tasted it. Why? To one who could have sent the rose's cruel message this visit of adieu could not have been disturbing. A little cake that had once been hot lay at the side of the saucer. It was untouched.

How long was it since his visit? She remembered the glimpse of the solitary horseman on the Parkhurst road. That answered her, perhaps. Oh, the restless afternoon! Had she not known, she asked herself—had she not known that while she sat chafing at the Hattons' there was happening that which would affect the whole of her life? Had she not known it when she lashed her mare to a greater speed along her homeward road?

Why had she not left Hatton at three, as she had intended? Then she might have been in time to see him. To see him? Did she wish it?

There rose within her a fierce resentment against him who was dearer to her than her life. Had she merited his rebuke? If she had let him see that she cared for him, had he not led her to suppose that he thought of her with a like warmth? It was humiliating. How hot was her face! Would that shamed color ever leave her cheeks again? Would her head ever be cool any more—would her temples cease to throb?

She went over to a looking-glass and noted her flaming eyes, but she saw that her lip was trembling. She knew that but for her pride she could have flung her-

self down beside the chair where he had sat and have wept such tears as would have come from her very soul.

A sound on the gravel averted the possible storm. The rise and fall of her bosom she could not quite control, otherwise she was not noticeably disturbed when Lady Julia came in from the garden.

"Oh, you have come back, Gertrude? When? I didn't hear you. Had you a pleasant party?"

"Neither more agreeable nor more dull than I expected. You know Mrs. Hatton. We talked of primroses till they were a good deal more to me than simple flowers at the water's brim."

She laughed as if at her recollections. Something in her aunt's manner struck her, and she broke off suddenly:

"Your headache, Aunt Julia! I expected to find you lying down. Instead, I find you have been having some one to tea."

"Mr. Woodford," said Lady Julia, without looking at her niece.

"I know. He came to say good-bye."

When her aunt looked up she found Gertrude's eyes fixed upon her meditatively.

"How did you know?"

"I saw his card in the hall."

There was a pause. Lady Julia took up her work and worried a skein of silk.

"And you saw him?" said Gertrude. "You were able, I mean?"

"My head was better."

"Where is he going?"

"I really forget," said Lady Julia; "I remember ask-

ing him. I think he said something about America. Hadn't he a ranch or something? I am really not certain."

Lady Julia's manner had not its normal repose. Throughout the interview Gertrude fancied that her aunt was fighting some difficulty. She spoke a little more hurriedly than was usual to her, and her face was flushed. She had not yet found the end of her silk. Gertrude watched the impatience of the shapely hands.

"You are entangling that, Aunt Julia," she said, quietly.

The disconcertion of her aunt, which she attributed to a wrong cause, served to regain for her her own balance. Lady Julia rose hurriedly and put down her work.

"The room is stifling," she said, going over to the door to open it and create a draught, "and I wish you would break yourself of your habit of staring, Gertrude. You really stare one out of countenance. If you have anything to ask, ask it at once. He did not leave any message for you, except that I should say that he was sorry not to say good-bye to you. He leaves the Manor to-morrow. That is all I have to tell you."

Lady Julia made a bad exit.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Gertrude heard of the going of Woodford from Harwood.

It was five o'clock when he rode up to Eastwood. Lady Julia was writing letters in the library. Ger-

trude's restlessness had driven her into the garden, and there she received him. Her mood was uncertain. She was preoccupied, gloomy, restive by turns. He was struck by her pallor and by a curious brightness in her eyes. Something of the assertiveness of her health was gone. She seemed in a night to have become fragile. She laughed sometimes, but without much ring of mirth; and she had a tendency to become absent when she talked. She began one or two sentences and broke off. Pressed to continue, she allowed that she had forgotten what she wished to say.

Harwood said that he supposed he would never know what he had missed.

"Never," said Gertrude. "But I don't think you need be distressed on that score. I don't suppose it was anything of importance. Nothing of importance ever happens."

"You don't look well," said Harwood.

"And hasn't any one told you that you should never tell one that?" asked Gertrude. "I have a headache. Aunt Julia had it yesterday, and when she had done with it she gave it to me. As I had a head, I thought I might just as well have a pain in it; and it would have been such a pity to let it go out of the family."

By the foolish words she should have been in jest. Her tone was not very lively.

"Who do you think has just gone away?" he said, presently.

Gertrude, with a sudden hardening of her lips, thought that she could tell. But she did not answer his question. When she spoke it was irrelevantly.

Clouds were gathering in the sky; the leaves shivered

on the trees; there were short gusts of wind; a shutter flapped somewhere on the house; the hills were black with shadow.

"It will rain to-night," said Gertrude. "I hope it will. I wish it would—rain and rain and rain, and make a flood and drown us."

Harwood laughed.

"Are you so hard up for experiences?" he said. "I would come in a punt to your window and save you."

"You could take Aunt Julia," said Gertrude; "I should stay, I think. Oh, what pitiful nonsense I am talking! What were you saying?"

"I was going to tell you that Woodford was gone."

A louder gust of wind made the branches creak. Above the hedge, which at the foot of the park skirted the road, there rose a thick cloud of dust. It was swept boisterously along. The sky grew darker; no birds were singing. Between the gusts there was a sullen silence. Nature seemed to be waiting.

Lady Julia came to the window.

"There is going to be a storm," she said. "You had better stay to dinner, Mr. Harwood."

"Yes, do," said Gertrude; "do stay to dinner. I am sure you have no engagement. And there is going to be a storm, and you will be caught in it if you go now."

Harwood had never received so cordial an invitation from her before. She had spoken in a low voice, and she walked a few steps away from him. He looked from her to Lady Julia.

"I shall be very glad," he said.

Lady Julia nodded.

"That's right," she said. "You would get wet

through if you didn't. I think we shall have thunder, myself."

She went in through the window.

"I am sure of it," said Gertrude, feverishly. "There is electricity in the air. I know there is. I feel it. See how my hand is trembling. That is why my head is aching. That is why I am so restless. That is why I look ill. Don't you know that it is? Don't you see that I am not myself? Don't you feel it?"

Harwood said something commonplace about thunder clearing the air, and Gertrude laughed.

It was true that she was trembling. She had grown paler in the last few minutes. Her head and her hands were hot. Her heart was beating so loudly that she wondered that he did not hear it. She looked at him and measured his powers. Something in the sight of his well-cut clothes, his neatness, his smartness, the small curled mustache, the contented expression, reassured her. She need not fear to gain from him such information as she desired. He was not of the observing kind. She remembered how once before he had told her all she wished to know without any consciousness of being impelled.

"I knew that Mr. Woodford was going," she said, after a pause. "You probably bring us later news. He is gone?"

Harwood nodded.

"He went to-day?"

"Yes—by the 4.50. I went down to see him off. I only heard he was going yesterday, when I chanced to meet him on the Parkhurst road. By-the-way—yes, he said he had been here."

"I believe he came to say good-bye," said Gertrude. "I was at Hatton, and I did not see him. He did not stay down here very long, did he? I suppose he could not get up any interest in us. Did he say where he was going?"

"London first; then to some people in Scotland; and then I don't think he quite knew himself."

Gertrude looked at the speaker in surprise.

"Aunt Julia said he spoke of his ranch," she said.

"Not yet," replied Harwood; "not yet, at least. He told me that he had no definite plans. The whole thing seems very sudden. Mrs. Woodford was quite huffy about it—said she didn't know why he couldn't make himself happy at the Manor. He took her very good-temperedly, but it was easy to see that he did not like being questioned."

Gertrude longed to know how he looked, but she would not ask. A few minutes later Harwood told her.

"Wretched," he said; "altogether out of sorts, and in such bad spirits."

Gertrude caught her breath—with a sound, perhaps, for he turned to her in question.

"What?"

"I didn't speak," said Gertrude. "You were saying—"

"That he looked so ill— Good God! Miss Maxwell, I am sure you are ill yourself. Won't you come in?"

There was a sudden flash of lightning. It rent the black pile that hung low over the hills.

"The storm has come," said Gertrude. "We had better go in-doors. I shall be better in a few minutes. Don't ask me again."

"Very well," said Harwood. "But I wish you would take care of yourself."

"I will. I am all right. It is the storm."

They walked in silence up to the house. Overhead the thunder boomed and clapped and rattled. An echo repeated the sounds. Large drops of rain began to fall. As the pair reached the windows, a second tongue of flame cleft the looming sky.

Gertrude trembled more.

"Oughtn't you to go and lie down?" said Harwood, doubtfully. He was not sure whether the suggestion would not be taken in the light of a disregard of recent instructions.

"No," said Gertrude; "I am going to stop here and watch the lightning. Did you see that flash? I tell you, I shall be all right in a few minutes. Don't look at me as if you thought I was going to faint. Oh, what a peal of thunder! How near it is! Don't you like watching for the lightning—looking where you saw it last, and wondering whether it will be now, or now, or now? There it is—what a blinding flash! One might bet on it by one's watch—for or against the chance of a flash before such a minute. Shall we? No; it would be horrible. I might be struck, or you, and win or lose the bet in another world. Can you hear me? The thunder is deafening."

Harwood was looking at her in surprise. He had never seen her in this mood before. In the girl beside him, whose eyes were ablaze, and whose face was so white, he scarcely recognized the calm and self-reliant Miss Maxwell.

In the room behind them the gloom grew more and

more dense. One by one the familiar objects offered themselves, to be revealed only by the lightning. The piano was a dark mass, relieved by a streak of white, representing the keys. Deeper shadows were chairs and tables.

"Look at the rain," said Gertrude, still in the same nervous tone that characterized her speaking on the day of which I write—"look at the rain; every drop is the size of half a crown. How silent you are! Why don't you talk?"

The water ran in little rivers off the gravel. From the roof a spout of water poured itself with loud splashing onto the stone outside the window.

"There must be a nest in the pipe," said Harwood. He could think of nothing else to say. He was, in fact, at every moment expecting something to happen. He was ready to catch Gertrude if she should fall. He was sure that she was going to faint.

Lady Julia came in from the library. Her manner was not normal, either, he thought.

"What an awful storm!" she said. "I couldn't stay by myself any longer. Gertrude, come away from the window. It frightens me, your standing there."

Gertrude laughed. She would not leave her place. She would not miss what she was seeing for anything. She was not in any more danger because she looked on at the havoc of the storm than if she sat on a sofa in the dark, as her aunt was doing.

Lady Julia wished to close the shutters and have lamps brought in. Gertrude spoke of the ostrich and its habits, and laughed again. Her laugh broke into a little cry.

A more than usually dazzling flash lit up the room with a double throb of light. Lady Julia closed her eyes.

"This is awful!" she said. "Gertrude, darling, come away."

"An elm in the park was struck," said Gertrude. "I saw it."

Harwood went to the window.

"There, on the left of the drive. Look, one side of it is stripped! You will see it in the next flash."

He looked in the direction she indicated. The clouds obscured the landscape. The hills had disappeared long since. The lines of the pelting rain were close and even. At the news that the lightning had done damage so near home Lady Julia became more alarmed than before. She went to the window and tried to draw her niece away.

"It may be foolish," she said, "but I can't say how nervous it makes me, your standing there. Please come away—please, Gertrude. There's another flash! It blinds one! Oh, listen to the thunder! It was almost simultaneous. We are in the very midst of this storm. It is awful, awful! Gertrude, how ill you look! Aren't you well?"

"I am quite well," said Gertrude, impatiently. "I have a headache. I shall be all right when the storm is over."

"I feel as if it would never be over," said Lady Julia. "I am dreadfully frightened, Gertrude. I didn't know I was such a coward. I feel as if this was a judgment on me—"

"For what, Aunt Julia?"

"I don't know. I don't know what I am saying. Did you see that? Oh, please come away! Mr. Harwood, do persuade her to come away."

"I don't suppose there is more danger in the window than anywhere else," began Harwood.

Gertrude interrupted him.

"I won't stop at the window if it makes Aunt Julia unhappy," she said; "but it seems rather nonsense, doesn't it? If the lightning is looking for me, I dare say it will be able to find me, even if I hide my face in a cushion on the ottoman."

Lady Julia shuddered.

"How can you talk so recklessly, Gertrude?"

Harwood was smiling complacently in the darkness. There was something going on that he did not quite understand. Lady Julia might have been conscience-stricken from her manner, he was thinking—if there had been anything to be conscience-stricken about. Without quite knowing why, he was reminded vaguely of Pharaoh and the plagues.

Later on he was again reminded of the stubborn Egyptian when, the storm dying away, Lady Julia regained her composure. The danger past, she became once more the woman of the world. He could have imagined her saying, "I will not let the people go." Her attitude changed entirely. She made no further comment upon Gertrude's evident indisposition. Contrary to the girl's assertion, with the going of the storm she did not revive. Her excitement left her, it is true, but her spirits did not return. She seemed plunged in a gloom which she took no pains to dispel. She was silent, and merely joined in the conversation when

politeness made it necessary. Harwood thought of her pressing indorsement of the invitation to stay to dinner, and contrasted her manner then with her depression now. She ate little and refused all wine. She drank water thirstily. Her pallor remained, but her eyes no longer blazed with any unnatural brightness.

The rain was falling softly outside on the terrace. Its vehemence had given place to a gentle and steady downpour. Only a distant rumble of thunder spoke of the storm that had raged over Eastwood.

Lady Julia did not allow the conversation to flag. She did not appear to observe her niece's silence. Harwood could scarcely have told, indeed, whether she saw, as he himself saw plainly, that something was amiss. He found his eyes wandering often in Gertrude's direction. Soon after ten Harwood rose to go.

It was a pity that to him, and not to Gertrude, Lady Julia's manner during the storm was suggestive of Pharaoh repentant.

CHAPTER XIX.

Another day passed, and another, and another, and another, but no news came from France.

Gertrude lay awake at night, and watched for the letter-bag in the morning. She was tormented with restlessness. Nothing would fill the void that served her for a heart. When she was in-doors she went from room to room. She might have been seeking something which she never found. She went out and took

long and lonely walks. The summer was hurrying to an end. Autumn tints began to fleck the woods with red and yellow. When there was wind, leaves fluttered down. The world was changed, and changing more. It seemed very empty in these days.

Where was France? At one time Gertrude put all thought of him resolutely from her, and her expression took a hardness foreign to her face. At another she visited every spot that had any association with him. She went down to the brook. It ran grayly under a leaden sky. She went to the bridge where she had met him after the two days' rain. She could see him now as he had looked down at her from his horse. Again and again she sat in the chair on the terrace and looked at the spot where he had been sitting when he sang to her. She thought with tears of the incident of the song — the song that belonged to the man who died. She went up into the woods behind the house to see the roof of the Manor.

How many were the tears she shed! When she was not hardening her heart against France, she admitted frankly to herself that she loved him. She loved him still. She would always love him. He was all the world to her. He was France. So much had she cared for him that she had not concealed her love from him, and—he was gone, without even a word, or worse, with a conventional message of regret and good-bye.

She was bewildered by what had happened. A hundred things were inconsistent with his sudden departure and this lasting silence. Words, looks, gestures, had told her that she was dear to him. Gertrude thought of the thousand and one lives of fiction that were

wrecked through some misunderstanding that half a dozen words would have set at rest. Everything might be explained, she thought, but his silence. The return of her rose might not have the dire meaning that she attached to it, his going might be unavoidable, but why did he not write?

The night of the concert of the Parkhurst Habitation of the Primrose League came and went. Gertrude pleaded a cold, and did not attend it. A couple of days later she met Mrs. Hatton.

"So sorry you couldn't come," said the wife of the member; "we had such a successful evening. Everything went off well. Miss Ransom kindly took your place, but we missed you very much, and there were many inquiries for you. Mr. Woodford's banjo—"

"What had you instead?" asked Gertrude.

"Instead?" said Mrs. Hatton. "We had nothing instead. He played himself."

Gertrude was riding. Her grip tightened on the reins.

"He—played—himself?" she said, slowly, as if she would be convinced of the meaning of the words she used.

"Came down on purpose," said Mrs. Hatton, triumphantly.

The world seemed to go round before Gertrude's eyes. To gain time, she leaned down and patted her mare's neck.

"It was the success of the evening," went on Mrs. Hatton, presently; "and he gave us two encores. What a sweet voice he has! I declare his singing nearly made me cry. But perhaps you have never heard him. I wish you had been there. You can't think how much

pathos he gets out of some of those little plantation songs. And, do you know, we think he is so good looking!"

Mrs. Hatton spoke with the air of one who has made a discovery, and is proud of it.

Gertrude said nothing. She could find no voice.

"And how pleasant he is in a house!" said Mrs. Hatton, nothing conscious of the storm she raised. "He is one of those people that the more you see the better you like. We are enchanted with him. He has charming manners. Wasn't it good of him to come down? He wrote to me, you know, to say that he was leaving the Manor, and that he would not be able to sing for me as he had promised. And I wrote back and implored him to come down to us for the night. It is not so very far from London. I was so afraid that my concert would not turn out well. I had had one or two other disappointments, you know, and so I asked him to take pity on me, and reminded him that a promise is a promise. He left us yesterday morning, though we pressed him to stay on. We quite miss him. I think he liked being with us, and one can't help liking him. I looked at him, and thought to myself, 'There are probably lots of poor girls unhappy for you, my young man.' I should think he was one of those people who could not help being pleasant to whoever he was with."

The grammar and construction of Mrs. Hatton's sentences were not very brilliant, but her meaning was always clear.

Gertrude winced.

"But perhaps you didn't know him very well," added Mrs. Hatton.

Gertrude found her voice.

"I don't think I knew him very well," she said.

Mrs. Hatton nodded, and made ready to drive on.

"Lady Julia quite well? Yes? That's right! You look rather pale yourself, Miss Maxwell. Your cold, of course. So sorry it kept you from my concert. Good-bye."

Gertrude rode on; the tears ran to her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

Her first sensation was one of deadly disappointment that she should, of her own accord, have been absent from the concert. It was true that she had a cold, but not so bad that she could not have gone had she had the inclination. Fate was against her. Then she asked herself, as before, whether she wished to see him. Her wounded pride answered, No. Her love, which was herself, cried Yes, yes, yes—a thousand times, yes! Come what might, come what would, Yes, yes, yes! His singing! Did she not know it? Had not her own heart been stirred at the undefinable melancholy with which he imbued the cheap sentiment of the songs he sang? His face good looking? His face was beautiful, and she was miserable. One of those people who cannot help being pleasant to those they are with? Was he of this type—the lover who rides away?

She could not think of him as less noble than she had supposed. Her idol had no feet of clay. His life was his own. If he did not give it to her, he had the right to withhold it. If she was one of the girls who were unhappy for him, the fault was her own. She was suffering at least worthily, but she had never known him.

Gertrude spent a bitter hour, and returned to the

house. Lady Julia was writing letters. She seemed to be always writing letters and speaking of Mr. Graham. The scratching of her pen irritated Gertrude to the limit of her patience. If Lady Julia saw Gertrude's unhappiness—and Gertrude was at small pains to conceal it—she made no sign. She only looked up from her letters, and said:

"How popular Mr. Graham seems to be! He has been staying with the Windermeres, and they are all enchanted with him. Lady Windermere tells me that her sons are all devoted to him; and I always think it is a good sign when a man is popular with men."

"I don't know," said Gertrude, with antagonism. "I don't know why you are forever cramming Mr. Graham down my throat."

But she did know. She knew exactly, and also what was likely to happen. Lady Julia believed in a puff preliminary, and Gertrude read her sufficiently well to guess that sooner or later Graham would be asked down to Eastwood for shooting—and other things.

Lady Julia argued as we have seen, and she preserved towards her niece an attitude of masterly unobservance. Inwardly she made notes of all that passed, but she reasoned from precedent that the girl's sufferings were temporary, that the feelings had little depth, and that she herself was acting in the girl's real interest. That she started upon wrong premises I think our own knowledge of Gertrude tells us.

The days became weeks. Gertrude's spirits did not return, but if Lady Julia had been hoping for this she determined to count upon it no longer. It might be, she thought, that Gertrude's very depression and indif-

ference as to what became of her would further her own ends.

To her surprise, the girl received the news that guests were expected at Eastwood with some signs of pleasure. Henry Maxwell was among those invited, and Gertrude hailed with delight the prospect of having her brother with her again. Possibly she expected from him a clearer understanding than he would have of her; but be this as it may, she began to count the days to his arrival.

"Who else is coming?" she asked.

Lady Julia mentioned some names, and among others those of Lord and Lady St. Pancras, and—Mr. Graham.

Gertrude smiled and walked away.

CHAPTER XX.

Henry Maxwell was of a type not uncommon in his class. He was the idle man.

His features bore a certain resemblance to those of his sister, though his expression lacked the resoluteness of hers, and indolence had set its stamp upon him. Gertrude, it may be said, was indolent, too, but this was from nature rather than habit. In Henry nature and habit were synonymous, and he was content to drift through his life. Moreover, there was in his face an instability and want of purpose that was borne out in all that he did—in his half-formed projects, in his pursuits begun and abandoned, and in the ease with which his will was dominated by a stronger, or even, with persistence, by one of no greater strength than his own.

Gertrude knew him to be unreliable, but he was, nevertheless, very dear to her. He arrived one morning, and she met him at Parkhurst.

He thought her looking ill, and he told her so, as he sat beside her in the dog-cart and she drove. She turned the conversation to other matters. She laughed a good deal, but it did not strike him that she was in good spirits. She told him again and again how glad she was to have him with her. She bent her face to his to be kissed. He looked at her once or twice in a puzzled way. A change had come over his sister. It seemed to him that something had been added to her beauty. Her manner was nervous. When she was not talking rapidly her eyes were tragic.

"Gertrude," he said, suddenly, "I don't know what it is, but something has happened to you. What? I am looking at you, and I don't know you. Make a clean breast of it, dear. Your brother is a man of large sympathies. It won't be the first time that his sister has opened her heart to him—or other people's sisters, either, for that matter. What is it?"

Gertrude said nothing. She turned her head a little, so that he might not see her face. There was silence, broken by the noise of the wheels and the sound on the road of the horse's hoofs. Henry waited a few minutes. Then he leaned forward.

"Why are you crying, Gertrude?" he said, gently.

Her answer was to thrust the reins blindly into his hand and to bury her face in her pocket-handkerchief. Maxwell was taken aback. He had seldom seen his sister show emotion before. Like Lady Julia, he had often questioned her capability of feeling any emotion.

"You are not yourself. I was sure of it the moment I saw you."

For the first time Gertrude realized that she was changed.

"Don't question me," she said, hurriedly. "Perhaps I may tell you partly after a time. You are wrong. I am myself—terribly myself!"

He looked at her again, and then he whistled a few bars of a song that he knew was familiar to her. The words presented themselves to her as he had intended:

> "I attempt from love's sickness to fly in vain,
> For I am myself my own fever and pain."

There was another pause after this. Gertrude dried her eyes, and took back the reins. She saw the Manor through the trees, and felt one of those sudden stabs of pain to which she was almost growing accustomed. After a time she spoke. She did not look at him.

"That would be rather unlikely, wouldn't it?" she said. "When have I ever cared for any one? There was Robin Wakefield — poor Robin! It did not last long. You know that I have never had it in me to care for any one but myself and you."

"Why can't you trust me, Gertrude?"

"Because, Henry, much as I love you, I am not blind to your faults. You would waver between me and Aunt Julia. Dear old Henry, you are too indolent ever to be quite stanch."

"Supposing that I admit that Aunt Julia's arguments, in their worldly wisdom, might have weight with me, had you not better adjust a balance by telling

me your side first? Am I invited as peace-maker into a house of strife?"

"Aunt Julia and I never quarrel," said Gertrude.

Henry smiled, and for the time the matter dropped. Gertrude missed her opportunity. Her aunt never lost a chance.

It was only a few minutes after the arrival of her nephew that she carried him off to the library. Here he listened to her for an hour.

"You weren't justified," he said, when he had heard her story.

"Of course you say that at first," she answered. "I expected nothing else. Don't be a fool, Henry! You have a certain amount of common-sense; exercise it. What would you have said to me if I had allowed things to go on as they were. He had nothing—two or three hundred a year at the most, and no prospects."

"With what Gertrude has of her own they would have jogged on very well. I cannot think that you were justified. I wonder at old Midlands lending himself to such a scheme."

"St. Pancras knows nothing whatever about it. I have exercised my own judgment in the matter entirely. Gertrude chose to like this young man, and you know Gertrude. She is of the new school, and she does not hold herself bound by conventionalities. When I found that in my absence she had had him here to lunch—to lunch, I trouble you!—don't you think it was time to interfere?"

"In the case of any other girl, perhaps," replied Maxwell, slowly; "in the case of Gertrude, no. You know quite well—you must forgive me, Aunt Julia—you

know quite well that if he had been what you choose to call eligible, Gertrude might have had him here to supper alone—more, if you had thought well of the chance, a telegram, or something, might have called you away. Woodford had intentions—"

"Oh yes—*every* intention," said Lady Julia, talking through her nose, as was her habit when she was annoyed, "and they were nipped in the bud. You are just a little bit ungrateful, Henry. Practically, I have saved your sister from making a bad match. I get, it seems, small thanks for my pains."

"You see," said Henry, smiling, "you have at the same time saved her possibly from the dire fate of a happy marriage. You must remember, Aunt Julia, that you saved Kate Beckenham in like manner."

"I steered Kate safely past certain dangers," said Lady Julia. "She owes me some thanks."

"You secured position for her, Aunt Julia."

"You are sometimes a little bit vulgar, Henry. It comes from the Maxwell side, I think."

But Lady Julia had no wish to quarrel with her nephew. She knew that it would be to her material advantage to have him on her side. So she ceded a point.

"Let us put aside the Beckenham question altogether," she said, presently. "Of course I know that poor Beckenham is not all that he should be, and so there is little analogy between the cases. Everybody likes Mr. Graham—everybody—"

"Everybody likes Woodford," said Henry. "I know something of him, for I knew a chap who was ranching with him—a man called Essex. He died, poor fellow!"

Lady Julia moved impatiently.

"Let us understand each other. What is your attitude going to be?"

"Antagonistic," said Maxwell, sweetly.

"I know you better," said his aunt.

"That or neutral," said Maxwell. "To be neutral would be less trouble. But I incline somewhat to the other."

"You will help me?"

"I think not."

"What then?"

"I have some thoughts of telling Gertrude exactly what has happened."

"Too late for that," said Lady Julia.

"If I see that she continues to be unhappy, I think I shall, all the same," said Maxwell.

"Gertrude unhappy!" cried Lady Julia, with a laugh. "She has no deep feelings, nor ever had. She does not even gauge the pain she inflicts herself. You know that Captain Knutsford proposed to her a few weeks ago. Anybody could see when he was down here last that he was madly in love with her. I wish you could have seen the coolness with which she took his letter."

"Poor old Knutsford," said Henry. "I heard about it. But Gertrude has awakened to a knowledge of herself. I saw that in two minutes."

"I can only argue from what I have seen," said Lady Julia, but not without a certain misgiving. As we know, she had seen much lately to belie her estimate of her niece's character. "Let us, however, leave it this way," she added, after a short pause; "what is done, is done. You shall be neutral till you see how you like Wilfrid Graham."

CHAPTER XXI.

Henry Maxwell did not press Gertrude again for confidences, and Gertrude herself, after the strange and sudden revelation of her unhappiness, made no further allusion to it. She was relieved when time passed and her brother did not question her. She knew that during the drive to Eastwood she had almost made a full confession, and she could not feel too thankful that she had been spared, or rather that she had spared herself, this humiliation. The affection between herself and her aunt, though sufficient to answer its own purpose, was not of a kind conducive to a close interchange of thoughts; and, with many friends, Gertrude was not the type of girl who establishes any real intimacy with members of her own sex.

At this period in her life, for the first time, she felt the need of some one to whom she could speak of herself. The sight of her brother, and the knowledge of mutual affection, almost loosed her tongue. There were times when in the hunger of her heart she could have spoken of France to a very stranger. She was thinking of him always; he was her last thought at night, her first in the morning. Her restlessness did not abate; she was tortured to the full. The mystery of her suffering was presented to her when she thought of how it had come about. If she had known the end, she wondered whether she could have regulated the extent to which she let her heart go out to him. Would she ever forget him?

She had a dream one night which seemed to her to define one phase of her feelings.

She was in Hades, so she thought, and thither her disquietude had followed her. She was weary, but she could not rest. Her heart was wrung with memories. She was pursued by the ghosts of the days that had been. She went from spot to spot. The future was without hope. The present was made miserable by the recollection of the past. Her anguish found utterance. "Peace; oh, for a little peace! Where shall I find it?" A shade came to her. "Follow me," he said, "and I will show you where it may be found." He led her to the stream of Lethe. "Take of the waters," he said, "drink and forget." But she shrank back. She would not drink of Lethe lest she should forget! And she woke.

At the cost of precious memory she would not abate her pain by one jot. She suffered doubly because she had to suffer in secret. Her brother was unreliable, and, like Mary, she kept all these things in her heart.

In her loneliness strange devices for solacing herself occurred to her. She wrote long letters to two of the men who had been in love with her. At this moment she felt that she could not allow all love to go out of her life. She wrote to Wakefield, and reminding him of pristine friendship, she asked him if she was forgotten. What had happen to him in all this time? Was it well with him? She wrote four pages and she tore them up. Some comparison between him and Woodford suggested itself, and she experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling.

To Knutsford she wrote a letter which she posted.

If later she could have seen the joy with which he received it, she would have realized better her cruelty.

Her aversion to Brabant fell into abeyance. His restless presence had a meaning for her, and she wished to see him. She chanced to meet him in the village a couple of days after her brother's arrival. She put out her hand.

"You never come to see us," she said. "Why?"

"I used to go to Eastwood very often," he said for answer.

"And now, never."

"And now, never," he said. "You don't want me. You wouldn't be glad to see me."

"You give me no opportunity of being glad or sorry."

Gertrude knew that she was trifling with a great danger, but something that seemed outside herself urged her to recklessness. He was on foot like herself, and Fenton lay beyond Eastwood.

"Our paths lie in the same direction," she said.

He gazed at her in surprise.

"When, once before, we were in this case," he said, slowly, "you refused to move till I should be gone."

Gertrude remembered, and made no reply. They began to walk side by side. From time to time he looked at her furtively. She knew well that he was trying to account for her mood. It must have seemed inexplicable to him. She found herself smiling, as this thought occurred to her. It suggested another. She was acting unjustifiably. He would infer more than she meant. What matter?

"So you have remarked that I never go to Eastwood," he said, after a pause.

"Of course," said Gertrude.

"I wish I understood you," he said, after another pause. "I should like to know whether any one gets close to you — whether, in fact, you have ever cared for any one in your life. I believe not. Yes, you may smile, Miss Maxwell, but I am inclined to think that when nature gives to a woman the power of attraction, some special dispensation protects her from the suffering which she inflicts reacting upon herself."

"What are you saying?" asked Gertrude, hurriedly.

"Do you know why I went away?" he said. Then he laughed. "Do you know why I came back? The answer is the same. I went away because I wanted to forget you. That was a month after you told me that you did not like me—"

"I never said that," said Gertrude, interrupting him.

"You meant it though," he answered. "You hated me that time. You let me see that plainly. I went away because I could not endure my life. You have no powers of knowing what my sufferings were. How could you? When I did not see you I could not rest because I had not seen you, and when I did see you I could not rest afterwards because I had. This is nonsense to you. I know that; but let me say this, Miss Maxwell, God save you from ever knowing the meaning of the days such as I went through. I determined to leave Fenton. I thought of going round the world —anywhere, it did not matter where, so long as I should see nothing to remind me of you. But I could not make my plans at once. I went to London, and by filling every minute of the day, I thought I should find some sort of peace. That answered about as well

as such plans ever answer. I got through a little time—"

He paused, and lapsed for a few seconds into thought. Gertrude was walking with her head bent. She did not seek again to interrupt him. She noted many trivial things—a marble dropped by some child upon the path, a skeleton leaf, a snail, the rusty water in the ditch. She knew that she was powerless to check the torrent of Brabant's words. She bent like a weed in the current that rushed over her.

"Then," he said, "I went down to stay with a man at Aldershot. I was quieter then. You did not haunt me quite so persistently as before, and I began to hope that I might cure myself. One night, being with my friend at the mess, I met a man called Knutsford."

Gertrude did not look up, but all the same she felt Brabant's restless eyes. She wondered what was coming.

"We went round to his rooms after dinner, and there I saw something which brought back the whole thing again. It was only a photograph of you, but, my God, it nearly drove me mad. Every thought that I had had of you came back. I spent that night walking, trying to walk you off"—he added, breaking into a laugh—"as one walks off a cold."

"Please stop," said Gertrude, with a sudden gesture, and in a low voice, "please stop."

She was trembling, under the knowledge of the depth of the man's passion.

"No, Miss Maxwell, I have not quite finished. I should like you to know everything."

They were nearing the lodge gates.

"Will you walk on a few steps?" he said, and Ger-

trude nodded in silence. From somewhere near came the sound of a gun. Harwood and her brother were doing a little mild shooting.

"I came back the next day. At all costs I felt that I must see you. I came round here in the evening, and stood for I don't know how long, where I could see the house. But most of the rooms were dark. I thought you must be away, and just as I turned to go the carriage came up the drive. I was within a yard of you. I watched you go in. Afterwards you stood at your window holding a letter in your hand. I saw you plainly in the moonlight. I just looked at you, slaking my thirst, and after a time you went. I watched till the light went out in your window—and after that, too, long after that, I looked at the place where you had been."

Gertrude thought of another midnight visitor, and her lip trembled.

"The next day I met you, as you remember. I saw that you wished to avoid me. I told you so. Your manner goaded me to frenzy. Miss Maxwell, think of what I had suffered. I felt an absolute satisfaction when I saw the red cut upon your wrist. I had lost my self-control when I kissed you."

"I know," said Gertrude, "I know."

He took something from his pocket. It was a small revolver. Gertrude shrank back as she saw it. A fear smote her that he intended to kill her or himself.

"This," he said, smiling, "is what you call in melodrama a 'glittering toy.' I carry it with me. I put it to my forehead one day—just here; do you see? The muzzle is very cold—how hot my head is—"

Gertrude looked round. There was no one in sight.

"Don't be frightened," he said. "I am not going to play with my toy just now. I meant to end it all, and then I thought I would wait. Look, I have put it away. I didn't mean to alarm you. I met you that day at Parkhurst, and you were kind to me — and I waited a little longer."

Gertrude stood still and put her hand on his arm.

"Promise me that you will never think of anything so awful again. Promise me. Do you hear? promise me. You frighten me."

She began to cry. He put his hand on the hand that rested on his arm. If she had looked up she would have seen with what yearning he looked down at her.

"I didn't mean to frighten you," he said, gently. "I ought not to have spoken as I did."

Gertrude looked up, then, into his face, but she saw it dimly through a mist of tears. She allowed his hand to rest on hers. She was softened towards him as she realized the havoc she had made of his life. His suffering seemed so closely akin to her own. Neither saw at this moment a fair-haired girl who stood at a stile in a field hard by and watched the scene.

"You think that I feel nothing," said Gertrude, unsteadily. "Oh, if you could know! I don't know why, but no one reads me fairly. I do feel things—I do, I do! I am often miserable and no one knows. There, I have told you what I have not told any one else. Don't think hardly of me. I don't deserve it. Indeed I don't. I wish I could comfort you. What was that?"

She stopped and listened. There was silence. The girl in the field had dropped to her knees beside the stile, and was pressing her handkerchief to her mouth.

"Be kind to me," said Brabant, below his breath.

"Tell me how."

"I don't know," he said, "but be kind."

Gertrude smiled through her tears.

"Don't think of me as happy," she said. "I am not. You would not think so if you knew. I scarcely know what to tell you to do. I shall always be glad to see you now, because—because I understand you. You said that I was not capable of understanding, but I do—better than you could ever think. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he said.

He held her hand and detained her.

"You have been good to me to-day. What will happen now, do you think? A few minutes after you are gone—I shall watch you out of sight—a few minutes after you are gone I shall be walking home. I shall see your face before me all the way. I shall think of every word you have said. I shall try to find some hidden meaning in each, and I shall not succeed, for you mean nothing—you mean nothing. Let me hear you say it—"

"In one sense you are right, but I will not say it; for I mean this—from my heart I wish you well, and I am sorry."

"And pity is akin—"

Gertrude shook her head.

"Don't try to find that sort of meaning," she said, gently, "for it will not be there."

"I shall reach home," went on Brabant, bitterly, "and it will be empty and desolate, and I shall get through the evening Heaven knows how."

"My friend, you are not alone in having to get

through time," said Gertrude—"and now once more, good-bye."

"I think I shall write a book," he said, "and call it—"

"Call it what?"

"*Love, the Disease.*"

CHAPTER XXII.

Lady Julia's party arrived in the course of the next few days. Gertrude, seeking distraction, found herself watching for the coming of Graham.

As the constant dropping of water leaves an impression on stone, so the recurring mention of his name had at last had an effect upon her in raising a certain curiosity anent the owner. The name had a place in her life. Wilfrid Graham; it was familiar to her as that of an intimate friend. Unconsciously she began to weave round it fancies of her own. Wilfrid Graham was this, she heard from Lady St. Pancras, and Wilfrid Graham was that. Lord St. Pancras said little, but Gertrude knew that there was conspiracy abroad. Henry avoided her. He was more affectionate to her than ever, but Gertrude was conscious of a restraint in him, which she attributed to her own silence upon the subject of a recent conversation. She was wrong. His restraint was due to a fuller knowledge than her own of the position of affairs.

Gertrude got back her color a little in these days. She had less time upon her hands. Every minute of the day was full. October had come in with fine weather. The birds were plentiful, the sportsmen in

good temper. Gertrude listened to the constant crack of the guns. The sound had established itself among the others of the autumn. A coming and a going of visitors kept the house in a continual and discreet bustle. Lady Julia was at her best. She was an admirable hostess. The individual comfort of each of her guests was studied, and if at the end of the evening, after her last genial good-night and a look into the smoking-room to see that everything was as it should be, she yawned very heartily in her bedroom, and told her maid that she might as well keep a hotel, she always appeared at breakfast smiling, fresh, and ready for the work of the day.

Lord St. Pancras looked at Gertrude very often, and tried to read her. He was only half satisfied with what Lady Julia had thought fit to tell him, and he said once more that the girl must not be made unhappy.

Lady Julia said: "My dear St. Pancras, you know Gertrude as well as I do."

Lord St. Pancras said: "My dear Julia, nobody knows anybody."

Lady St. Pancras said: "My dear John, if Gertrude doesn't fall in love with Wilfrid Graham, she must be hard to please."

Lord St. Pancras grumbled.

"Well, do you wish it, or don't you?" said Lady Julia.

"Of course I do," he replied.

"Then let things arrange themselves. We could not force Gertrude to marry against her inclination, even if we tried. We need not flatter ourselves that we could."

Gertrude herself, meanwhile, seemed to be made up

of three or four Gertrudes. There was the Gertrude who lay awake at night and thought of France, and the Gertrude who amused herself by day and sought to lose her pain in excitement, and there was the Gertrude who divined the Graham conspiracy, and the Gertrude who trembled sometimes when she thought of Brabant. She made no attempt now to understand herself. She was the sport of circumstance, she thought. She seemed blown hither and thither, and at some time she supposed there would come an end. Life must lead to something —if only to death.

With other distractions she avoided Brabant. She met him one day near the almshouses on the Parkhurst road. The woods were a blaze of color. Reds and yellows flamed amid the passing green. He came towards her with his gun. He had been with the shooters, and was going home.

She trembled while he held her hand. His face alarmed her. She fancied that she saw there a sign of something that was terrible.

"Is this being kind to me?" he said, in a low voice.

"Is what?" asked Gertrude. "Please let my hand go."

He did so.

"You are keeping out of my way," he said.

"What if I am?" said Gertrude, gently. "Is it not better that I should?"

"I don't know," he answered, wearily; "I don't know what is better and what is worse."

"Why don't you go away again?" asked Gertrude, presently. "You said that you were better that time. I wish you would."

A girl was coming out of one of the row of almshouses. She stood in the garden for some minutes.

"Why are you not happy?" he said, suddenly. "You said that you were not—why?"

"You must not question me, Mr. Brabant," Gertrude said, hurriedly. "I told you all that I could tell."

Brabant laughed.

"Would it help you to understand me," he said, "if I told you that I am glad that you are not happy? Sometimes I should like to hurt you. I believe I am naturally cruel."

Gertrude had stopped at a gate whence led a path across the fields to the house. A few minutes later she was traversing the path alone.

The sound of a footfall on the grass startled her, and she turned, fearing to see him following her. It was not Brabant, however, but a girl who was hurrying towards her, and Gertrude, waiting to be overtaken, recognized Miss Ransom.

Miss Ransom, we remember, had dropped by tacit consent on either side out of acquaintance with Miss Maxwell. It was she who had made one or two remarks to Woodford about the pretty Miss Maxwell. Gertrude knew this, and wondered what the girl could have to say to her.

Miss Ransom was a slight and fragile girl, with fair hair. Too pale and delicate to be pretty, her face had yet a certain charm, which owed its existence in part to an habitual expression of melancholy. Her skin was very transparent, and showed at the temples the blue tracery of veins. The eyes were dark and very bright. The nervous hands were long and white. As she ran

across the field Gertrude noted her slender feet and the tendency of the small ankles to bend under what must of necessity be a light weight.

"I want to speak to you," said Miss Ransom, in a strained voice. "I don't know whether it is easier or more difficult in that we are not—not intimately acquainted." She stopped abruptly, and looked Gertrude in the face.

Then a shamed flush that was painful to see spread over her face and colored her throat even, and her eyelids, and her forehead to the fringe of pale hair. She began to speak twice, and broke off. Gertrude waited for a few moments, and looked at some flowers she held to give time for the girl to recover herself. She divined vaguely what was coming.

Miss Ransom made a supreme effort, and gained the use of her tongue.

"This is dreadful," she said. "I miscalculated my powers. I thought I could have said what I had to say without making this pitiable exhibition of myself. But I will say it. I shall force myself to say it—"

"What have you to say?" Gertrude asked, quietly. Her self-possession made a cruel contrast to the other's confusion. Each was conscious of this.

"Haven't you enough?" said Miss Ransom, suddenly, and in a choking voice which Gertrude would never forget; "haven't you enough? What more do you want to fill your life? You are very beautiful—you know that, and I know it; and it must be so if I see it, for I hate you! You seem to me to have everything—everything. Look at your very clothes. You have never worn a shabby thing in your life, and I have to wear

just what they choose to give me. I am not an almshouse, and mamma spends money on nothing else. You do things well — you ride well, you drive, and you are not afraid as I am. Those are gifts to you that are denied me. They are no particular merit. They are of your nature. You have nerve, and I have none—or else I have too many. I don't know. You are never at a disadvantage. You don't run down at the end of an evening and look drawn and ugly, so that you would like to break the looking-glass that tells such hideous truths. You don't know what it is for it to be enough to wish very much for a thing, not to get it. You don't know what it is to be snubbed and thrown back upon yourself—to have not a friend in the world who cares for you. All this I know. It is not my fault, any more than it is to your credit to be physically beautiful."

Gertrude said nothing. She waited.

"All this I know," continued Miss Ransom, after a slight pause. "And other things that are worse than these I know. One has, and another hasn't. You have everything, and I have nothing, and yet, like God, you want to take from me even that which I had. I don't know that you can help it. I suppose the law is inexorable, but oh, it is cruel! it is cruel! Look here, you have had heaps of lovers—"

"Miss Ransom!" said Gertrude, suddenly.

"It is true, though," answered the girl, vehemently, "it is true! Do you think I don't know? I have watched you with men. They flutter round you like moths about a candle. I understand it. I see your attraction myself, so it must be there. I am not saying that you wish them to be drawn to you. I don't think

you do, or, at least, I don't think you try in any way to bring them to your feet. Well, men are never attracted to me. I understand that, too. I know why. I bore them, I think. I am awkward. And yet, when I am understood, this is not so. I want sympathy. I have lived without it. And the want of it has stinted my moral growth — indirectly, even my physical growth, because my looks depend upon my happiness. You will think me hysterical. I dare say I am. I believe I could fast and be clairvoyant. I have morbid tendencies. I think too much about myself. I am always dissecting myself. It is not my fault. I tell you I have been thrown back upon myself. I hate myself, and lately I have found an escape. I have found friends in drugs. I can lull myself to partial rest."

The color had quite fled now from the face that Gertrude was looking at in such surprise. How transparent was the pallid skin, how marked the stains under the eyes! The eyes themselves, Gertrude thought, were unnaturally bright.

"Why are you telling me all this?" Gertrude said.

She saw a mushroom as she spoke, and thought that presently she would pick it. A cow moved across the field and looked at the girls with sleepy eyes. The smoke of the chimneys of Eastwood rose vertically above the trees.

"Because I want you to know what you have taken from me. It would be less a crime to steal from a rich man than a poor one, wouldn't it? I am destitute, and yet you can take from me. Just look at me for a moment. I am plain, but I need not have been so from necessity. I have not bad features. I have decent eyes;

I have pretty hair; but I am plain because I have been denied everything. I have not good health; I have not good looks. See how thin I am. I have seen myself look pretty. I was pretty two years ago; I was not so thin. Now, of course, I am undermining my health with drugs. Their comfort kills one in time, I suppose; but I don't care. I was twenty. I had never had a lover, and then—George Brabant was my lover."

She stopped again. There were tears now in her eyes.

"I had been away from home a great deal, and it was when I came back that I met him, and he talked to me as no one ever had before. He cared for me then. He told me so; but there was no engagement. I loved him—I adored him. I thought of him night and day; and he cared for me, whatever may have happened since. Then you came to Eastwood. He was drawn to you like the others. You took from me the one thing that I had."

"But I took nothing from you," Gertrude said, slowly. "I never encouraged Mr. Brabant. I will be frank with you, I have never liked him."

"I know that you refused him some time ago," said Miss Ransom, still in the same choking voice. "You don't even want him yourself, and yet you keep him from me. Oh, give him back to me! I know his faults, but I love him for them. I know his temper. I think he could kill one when he is angry; but I would rather be killed by him than live without him. You don't want him—you have said so. You say you don't like him. Why do you meet him? I have watched you. I saw you together just now. I saw you a few

days ago. You let him hold your hand. You talked to him closely. I saw you. You stood like lovers. You put your very hand upon his arm and he put his hand on yours; and so you stood. I saw all that, and you tell me that you do not like him. What do you want of him if you do not like him? You refused to marry him when that happiness was offered to you. Why don't you let him alone? I ask so little. I ask you of your wealth to give me what you do not need."

The girl buried her face in her thin hands and sobbed. The slight form shook from head to foot. A very tempest swept over her, and she sank to the ground.

Gertrude looked round hopelessly. She felt her helplessness. Miss Ransom was clearly hysterical, and even at this moment there occurred to Gertrude a thought of the hideous possibilities that might follow an alliance between her and Brabant. Again she had the sense of being the sport of Fate. It seemed to her that revelation followed revelation. The experiences of a lifetime were now crowded into the short space of days. She had been shown the workings of two diseased minds. She prayed that her own might remain healthy. To her surprise the sight of the unhappy girl who sat rocking herself on the grass raised in her no very real pity, but as soon as Gertrude realized this, she sought to remedy it. In wishing that she could feel sorry, sympathy came. If half Miss Ransom's misery was due to imaginary causes, it was none the less dreadful.

She conquered her feeling of aversion, and gently touched the girl's shoulder.

"Will you believe me if I say that there is nothing between Mr. Brabant and myself." As Gertrude spoke

she was conscious that this was not altogether true, and she hastened to add: "He is nothing to me. I used to dislike him, I do not now; but I have not changed since I refused the proposal of which you know. Why should you hate me, Miss Ransom? I would not hurt you in any way. How can I help you? If I could I would."

The girl made no answer.

"Don't you think that you judge yourself wrongly?" Gertrude then said. "I cannot think that life can be as hard for you as you say. To begin with, forgive me," and Gertrude smiled, "you are wrong about your appearance. And I am sure you have more friends than you think."

"If you don't care for him, why have you met him?" said Miss Ransom.

"I met him by accident," said Gertrude, "and not by design."

She did not wish to be questioned with regard to the incidents which Miss Ransom had seen, and she hastened to speak again.

"Do you know that I should be glad if he were away?" she said. "I should be glad to know that we were separated by miles. If it will afford you any relief, I will promise to avoid him as much as I possibly can. He is dining at Eastwood one day next week, but I will talk to him as little as possible."

"Yes, avoid him," said Miss Ransom, eagerly. "Let him see that he is nothing to you; he is everything to me, and perhaps then he will turn to me."

"Very well," said Gertrude, with a shudder she could not repress. "Now I must go."

She shuddered again, and then she put out her hand.

"Let us think more kindly of each other," she said, gently. "This has been dreadfully distressing to us both. Let us forget it."

"Yes, let us forget it," said the other, dully.

She rose to her feet as she spoke; her dress was stained with the damp of the grass.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was a mood resulting in great measure from recent experiences that Gertrude met Wilfrid Graham, when at last he made his appearance at Eastwood. Her attempt to find some rest from herself in recalling Brabant had brought about anything but the end she desired. The thought of her interviews with him was odious to her, and from the recollection of the incident connected with Miss Ransom she shrank with loathing. It was October, and France had made no sign.

Wilfrid Graham, the much-boasted, turned out to be a very amiable young man, with good physical attributes, and a manner that Gertrude readily understood must win him many friends. He had an inexhaustible stock of animal spirits, and at dinner, for the first time for weeks, Gertrude found herself laughing merrily. He raised her out of herself. His eyes seemed always on the alert to see the amusing side of small things. He took life apparently as a jest. Gertrude allowed herself to yield to the charm of his manner. She would like to go through life laughing, she thought. She had done

with tragedy. Tragedy was tragic—then give her comedy or farce.

Brabant was dining at Eastwood. She caught his eye, and the laugh froze on her lips. Graham spoke to Lady St. Pancras, who sat on his other side. Gertrude fell into silence and thought. It happened that she was sitting precisely where she had sat upon the day of Woodford's lunch with her, and her eyes fell upon the grim portrait of Maxwell upon the wall opposite. She remembered that upon that day it had suggested to her a resemblance she had tried in vain to trace. It was a handsome face, but cruel withal, and an ugly story of murder was attached to the memory of the man who had once sat for the portrait.

Graham turned from Lady St. Pancras.

"Who was the original of the picture?" he asked.

"One Michael Maxwell," said Gertrude. "He is not very creditable as an ancestor. He lived in the time of Charles II., and he is supposed to have been in love with—let me see which—yes, the picture next but one to him—do you see?—the lady with the big eyes. She would have nothing to say to him, and she was to have been married to some one else, and he killed the bridegroom. Isn't it a cruel face? Can't you believe the story to be true of him? I wonder why we have the picture here."

"Perhaps they didn't hang the man," suggested Graham, "so the least they could do was to hang the picture."

"Be serious," said Gertrude, smiling. "What I have been telling you is a tragedy of the most pronounced type."

Lady St. Pancras leaned forward.

"You have stopped at the fourth act," she said.

"I never heard of a fifth," said Gertrude.

"Oh yes, there is a fifth," chuckled Lady St. Pancras; "the act that adjusts the story. She"—Lady St. Pancras nodded in the direction of the lady's portrait—"never cared for the man she was to have married."

"And the end?" said Graham.

"The curtain falls on possibilities. She cared very much for some one else—"

Graham laughed.

"Miss Maxwell finds the play a tragedy," he said. "I find it a comedy pure and simple. As Lady St. Pancras says, it is the last act that adjusts the story."

"A tragedy from the bridegroom's point of view," said Gertrude.

"Perhaps," said Graham. "And perhaps, after all, the murder might have been avoided. Michael Maxwell, if he wanted to kill any one, might have killed himself, and possibly a word to the bridegroom, and the marriage might not have taken place, and would have resulted in a clear stage for Edwin and Angelina. By-the-way, *that* is rather curious. Do you see a likeness anywhere?"

"Where?"

"In the picture to some one here."

Gertrude looked up at the canvas, and thence straight to Brabant. In that instant she had a flash of second-sight. She rejected the revelation as weak and fanciful.

"A little," she said; "something, perhaps, in the expression. He will see that we are talking of him. What did you do up in Scotland?"

The talk rolled then to other matters.

Lady Julia looked on well pleased. Gertrude had something of her old animation. It was clear that Graham admired her. Everything augured success to her own plans.

As the ladies left the room Lady St. Pancras linked her arm through Gertrude's. Miss Maxwell suited her step to the older lady's waddle, and thus paced the hall. She smiled quietly to herself when, presently, Lady St. Pancras gently squeezed the arm she held and said:

"Dear Gertrude," and put up her fat face to be kissed.

Later on, when Gertrude saw Lady Julia and Lady St. Pancras conversing, she had a fairly accurate knowledge of the subject of the discussion.

It surprised her that, at this period of her life, she was so little resistant. Just now it seemed to her that it did not matter very seriously what befell her. She was even content to leave the ordering of her destiny in hands other than her own. She had chosen once, and her choice had been withheld from her. Now let another choose. She could like Wilfrid Graham, perhaps, as well as she could like any one else.

The men came into the drawing-room. There was a vacant chair beside Gertrude, and together Graham and Brabant made for it. One of those awkward moments ensued that involve deeper issues than are at the time apparent. Graham was a step in advance of the other. Brabant drew back. Graham laughed.

"Shall we toss for it?" he said, good-temperedly.

"That is unnecessary," said Brabant, without relaxing to a smile; "it is yours—yours by the law of last and first."

Graham looked at Miss Maxwell.

"Last and first," he said, with an amused smile. "Why did he reverse the order?"

Gertrude did not answer. She was watching Brabant as he crossed the room. She could not see his face. Something in his carriage struck a fear into her heart. She trembled for the future, and for what she had done, and it was some minutes before the talk of Graham, in its lightest vein, could make her shake off an unpleasant impression. After a time, however, she succeeded in regaining such spirits as had been hers at the beginning of the evening. In half an hour Graham and she understood each other. He had a way in speaking of leaving certain things to the intelligence of his hearer. He followed an unfinished sentence with a look of amused question, to see whether his meaning was taken. This, by action and reaction, was flattering to both. Gertrude's wit was sufficiently ready to meet the exigencies of what was not, perhaps, a very brilliant conversation. At the least, it sufficed to make her apt to grasp his intention. Two or three times she found herself laughing merrily. Lady St. Pancras was once the cause of her amusement. Whenever the old woman caught the eye either of Gertrude or Wilfrid Graham, she smiled encouragingly. After the receiving of one of these smiles Gertrude and Graham exchanged an almost involuntary glance. Graham raised his eyebrows slightly. The result was some very real and spontaneous laughter. Lady Julia and Lord St. Pancras looked over in their direction and gave a fillip to the merriment.

"You laughed," said Graham, "because—"

"Because you laughed."

Henry Maxwell came over to learn the joke. There wasn't one, Gertrude and Graham told him simultaneously, and that was the best of it. Henry said that he had never before heard two people laugh so heartily at nothing.

"And yet that is what we are laughing at," said Graham.

"And you tell me, my dear St. Pancras," Lady Julia was saying, "that you will not have Gertrude made unhappy. She looks very unhappy now, doesn't she?"

"I confess I don't understand women," said the old man, chuckling; "but I do, by-the-way, understand wine. And that reminds me—"

It reminded him of a certain champagne in which he had an interest, and Lady Julia, her mind at rest about her niece, was well content to let the talk float buoyantly off upon this sparkling current. Later on she found an opportunity of making Henry assist in the further assuaging of such qualms of conscience as her worldly wisdom had not yet laid.

"Is or is not Gertrude breaking her heart for young Woodford?" she said to him.

"My good Aunt Julia, how can I possibly tell?"

"My good Henry, don't be a fool! Is she, or is she not, in excellent spirits?"

"Excellent—to all appearances."

"Should you, or should you not, like to see her well married?"

"If it is compatible with her happiness."

"Young Graham has everything to make a girl happy. My dear Henry, you know in your heart that you think I was right."

"Perhaps you were," he admitted.

"But of course," said Lady Julia.

Brabant was the only one of the party not staying in the house. He rose to say good-night.

"You will stay with the others and smoke," said Lady Julia.

"I think not, thanks. I must be getting back."

"You are coming to shoot to-morrow?"

Gertrude was standing near. He looked at her.

"I think not," he said.

"Another day, then," said Lady Julia, and she moved away.

"Nor any other day," said Brabant, below his breath.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It was Brabant in part who now helped matters forward. The taint of his inheritance had, Gertrude was convinced, begun to give its lurid color to his life. She went about in actual fear of him. Her aversion to him was intensified by her horror of the unhealthy passion which she knew him to have inspired in the hysterical Miss Ransom. She realized fully that it was illogical to be biased against him by a circumstance which he could not control, but she was none the less unable to refrain from bracketing the two people together, and, in the analogy of their ill-balanced minds, thinking of them as one. Some words rang in her ears. Brabant had spoken of Love, the disease; and the ugliness of the thought had a sinister meaning. She shrank from the

recollection of the words with shuddering. It revolted her that passion such as his, and that of Miss Ransom, and love such as her own, should be called by a common name.

It was a relief to turn to Graham with the twinkling eyes. It was like sailing into a calm and sunny bay out of a boisterous sea. He had no tempestuous emotions.

The conspiracy Gertrude very soon found was the most open thing in the world. Those implicated in it made no pretence of concealment. Lady St. Pancras continued to nod and to smile and to look encouraging.

Young people, she said, in such a case as the present, required encouragement. She had required encouragement herself when St. Pancras was a-wooing. Her husband chuckled, and said that he hadn't remarked that.

The days passed. Fresh relays of guests arrived. The conspirators stayed on. Lady St. Pancras grew excited. Every day she said she expected a certain little item of news, which, when it came, would be good hearing. Every night she said, "Do you think he has spoken?"

"Oh, give 'em time!" said my lord; "give 'em time!"

"And opportunity," suggested Lady St. Pancras.

"Julia 'll do that," said her husband, chuckling.

This was true. Henry Maxwell was very fairly right when he said to his aunt that if France Woodford had been desirable, she would not have expressed or experienced any righteous horror at the incident of the *tête-à-tête* luncheon. She would, indeed, have viewed it with the satisfaction with which she regarded every five minutes that saw her niece and Graham alone together. These five minutes occurred often in long succession, and made half-hours and hours.

Graham and Gertrude had been acquainted for a fortnight only when one Sunday, on the way to church, he spoke. The proposal was the most commonplace in the world. Gertrude heard his say quietly, and smiled. He said that he had not known her long, which was true, and they both laughed. But short as the time had been, he had learned to—

"Stop," said Gertrude, "don't deceive yourself; you haven't learned anything of the kind. Let us understand each other. Do you think I don't know? Think of Lady St. Pancras! What were we both laughing at the night I met you first, when we told Henry that we were laughing at nothing?"

"Very well, Miss Maxwell," said Graham, with amused resignation, "if you will have it so. It is perfectly true my uncle has been urging me to marry. I am his heir, as you know, and I suppose he has some sort of interest in my career. The alliance which I have ventured to propose is, I believe, his dearest wish. At least, believe this, Miss Maxwell," suddenly becoming grave, "since I have known you, it has been my own most earnest wish, too, and I have hardly dared to hope. I know you think because I take nothing seriously that I am entirely superficial, and that it is not in me to have any deep feelings, but you are wrong."

Gertrude thought of her own case. She took a few steps in silence. The blackberries were ripe now in the hedges. The church bell ceased its ringing. Two or three of the Eastwood servants hurried past with their prayer-books.

"We shall be late," she said.

"Too late to go," said Graham. "Let us take a walk instead."

Gertrude consented by her silence.

Lady Julia, at this moment in a creaking silk, and proclaiming herself a miserable sinner, noted the absence of her niece and Mr. Graham. There were other observers to note from the Eastwood pews, but these did not affect her. She had seen the pair start for church, and it had been her unexpressed hope that circumstances might prevent their attaining it.

"O, come let us sing unto the Lord," sang the choir —("I don't think they will come now," thought Lady Julia)—"in the strength of our salvation."

"Let us come before His presence"—("How well it was I made Betty come with me in the carriage!")—"and show ourselves glad in Him with psalms."

("I was quite certain when he proposed that he and Gertrude should walk that something would come of it. I suppose we shall know after church. I wish Mrs. Peck would not stare at this pew! How that woman's thoughts do wander in church!")

"The sea is His, and He made it"—("It isn't every girl whose husband owns a yacht. Gertrude ought to think herself very lucky!")—"dry land."

By the second lesson Lady Julia had worked herself up into a little fever of excitement. Presently she could not refrain from communicating with Lady St. Pancras.

"I think we shall hear something to-day," she whispered.

Lady St. Pancras was a little deaf.

"I say we shall know to-day," whispered Lady Julia.

"Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity," said Lady St. Pancras; "I have the collect marked."

Lady Julia resigned herself to waiting.

Gertrude, meanwhile, heard all that Graham had to say to her. Woodford's silence had to some small extent blunted her memories of him, but she knew that it needed only the smallest reminder—a glance, even, at a faded rose that she kept locked up in a drawer sacred to itself—to bring back all her misery. The misery was there still, though over it had grown a film which obscured it.

The sun struggled out from behind the clouds. It formed gorgeous colors up in the trees and hedges. Gertrude saw in the added light that the points of her neat boots were soiled by the muddy road. She marvelled at her own tranquillity. Strong feeling seemed to have left her. She had been listening to a proposal, which, if she accepted it, must forever shut France Woodford out of her life. But she was powerless to grasp her case. She looked up at Graham to see the manner of man who had asked her to give herself to him. He met her eyes and smiled.

What a good fellow he was, she was thinking. He would be *bon camarade*—just that. She could live merrily. He would understand her thoughts before she spoke them. There would be no depths of passion, but there would also be no pain. She would be able to make him happy—and how she was pining for a little happiness herself! He would be an escape from Brabant . . . but she was not in love with him. There was some tenderness in Gertrude's face when next she spoke.

"Will you give me a little time?" she said, gently. "I want to be honest with you and with myself."

"Yes, don't answer me yet," said Graham. "I don't wish you to do anything in a hurry."

"I want to realize the seriousness of marriage," said Gertrude, slowly.

After that they turned their steps homeward, and their conversation to other matters. Two things struck Gertrude then. One of these was that Graham, the light-hearted and with the twinkling eyes, was talking with effort; the second, that she herself was quite unable to appraise what had happened at its proper value, and was no more moved than if she had been to church with the rest in the ordinary course.

Henry, another absentee from the Eastwood pew, met them in the garden, where he was having a quiet smoke before lunch.

"Who was it said, 'I go,' and went not?" he said, smiling.

Gertrude said the parable was incomplete.

Presently the sound of the carriage on the drive announced the return of a contingent of the church-goers. Lady St. Pancras took her husband's arm and waddled out onto the lawn. Gertrude could not resist a furtive glance at Graham. He turned away smiling, and picked a flower, which he presented to his aunt. Lady Julia had brought Harwood back with her to lunch. He made his appearance presently with those who were walking. Gertrude took a turn on the terrace with him.

"Who didn't go to church?" he asked, banteringly.

"I wonder," said Gertrude.

"I'll tell you who did," said Harwood, "and that was Brabant. And he looked absolutely murderous. What is coming to him? I never saw any one look so wild."

"Oh, talk of something else!" said Gertrude, impatiently.

"Then we had a scene just before the sermon," continued Harwood, under the impression that he was making himself agreeable; "a girl fainted — fell her whole length—"

"Any one I know?"

"I don't think you do. You know her mother, of course—it was Miss Ransom."

Gertrude gave a gesture which Harwood failed to interpret. It seemed to her that there was no escape from these two names. At luncheon further mention was made of them. Gertrude tried to shut her ears. She plunged into conversation with Graham. He was a refuge to her.

The meal came to an end, and there followed the usual drowsy Sunday afternoon. Lady St. Pancras fidgeted about the drawing-room, and then, having seized on a book, disappeared. Her husband settled himself in the most comfortable chair in the smoking-room. Lady Julia went to her room to write letters, which was another way of saying to stretch herself upon the sofa and to sleep till tea-time. A click of balls sounded in the billiard-room, where, said Henry, he had taken a volume of Blair's "Sermons" to read aloud to such of the men as had missed the privilege of being present at church.

The day was cold. A party gathered round the cheerful fire in the hall. Gertrude went into the empty library and sat down on the broad sill of one

of the windows. She had taken down a book at random from a shelf. She leaned her head against the white wood-work behind her and closed her eyes.

She wanted to devote this afternoon to thinking out and facing the future. Let her not be deceived. France Woodford was dear to her as ever, though of late she had shut him out of her life. The gift of him had been too much to ask of the gods, and it had been denied to her. Had she not known it always? Such happiness as she had desired was too complete a thing to expect in a world of universal disappointment. She thought of the night when she had wrestled with the terror of the knowledge that he was to be taken from her. But that was not more terrible than the conviction that at last was forced upon her by his silence. He had never been hers—never, not even when every possible sign seemed to point to her unspoken possession of him. For a time he had deceived himself—had tried, perhaps, to like her, but he had never been hers, never, never, never! A wind had risen, and moaned drearily round the house. Leaves were falling. They fluttered sometimes against the panes.

A sound caused Gertrude to start. It was the cautious opening of the door. Graham looked in, and then came forward, closing the door behind him. Gertrude put her handkerchief to her eyes, but not in time to prevent him from seeing her tears.

"Shall I go?" he said, gently.

"No, stay," said Gertrude; "I want to talk to you."

He drew a chair up to the window. Gertrude looked out into the cheerless garden for some moments. He saw the quivering of her lips.

"I—I am not going to give you an answer yet," she said, turning presently with a tremulous smile, "and I want to tell you what may make you withdraw your offer. Every one seems so much to make it his or her business to talk about me, that I dare say you have been told that I have had other proposals—"

Graham nodded.

"Well, there is one thing that I know you have not been told. I have always been believed to be incapable of caring very much for any one. I half thought so myself, till—till I met some one, and—and learned to know myself—"

"Why do you tell me this?" Graham said, gently. "I know it hurts you to tell me. It will not affect my wishes."

With a gesture Gertrude waved his words aside.

"You must fill in the picture for yourself; I can't tell you. He didn't care for me, but I—I gave him all I had to give, and I suffer—oh, how I suffer!"

She put out her hand, and Graham pressed it silently.

"I had to tell you," she said, after a pause, "because I wanted you to understand. I think I could care for you, but he was first, and I think he will be first always. I am very unhappy. Is what I am saying unwomanly? I cannot help it if it is. It was honester to tell you the truth, wasn't it? Now you are free to withdraw your offer if you like."

Graham knelt beside the sill with his face close to hers.

"You said this morning that you didn't believe me when I told you that I loved you," he said, in a low voice. "Believe it now. I love you ten times more

for what you have said to me. I wish you could know me. I wish you could know how I would try to make you happy—how tender I would be to you. You say that you think you could care for me. I think I could make you care for me. At least, I would live for that. If you will marry me, I will try even not to be jealous. I will remember that you warned me, and that he—whoever he is—was first with you. Then by degrees you will forget him—"

"I do not want to forget him," Gertrude said; "that is the greatest part of my suffering."

There was no laughter in Graham's face as Gertrude met his eyes. She began to wonder whether she had misread this man as others had misread herself. She had judged him by a light-hearted manner and a few thoughtless remarks. She had called him superficial. She remembered presently that she was still looking at him.

Occasional sounds broke the stillness of the afternoon —the moving of a chair overhead, a burst of laughter in the hall, voices and the faint click of balls in the billiard-room, the bark of one of the dogs on the terrace.

Gertrude removed her eyes from his face.

"It is all so soon," she said, slowly; "you know so little of me."

"But if I do not feel that I know little of you?" he answered, smiling.

Gertrude smiled too.

"I will give you an answer to-morrow," she said.

Her eyes fell on the book she held. The cover was stained.

Graham saw the smile fade from her lips.

"Not to-morrow," she said; "not to-morrow! I can't tell you so soon. I— You don't know me. How can any one know me when I do not know myself?"

CHAPTER XXV.

THREE days passed. Graham waited with considerate patience. The more Gertrude saw of him the more she appreciated his worth. It was no false report of him that she had heard.

Lady Julia kept silence, but with great difficulty. She was sure that something had passed between Graham and her niece. She said as much to Henry.

"Let them alone," was his advice.

"Gertrude is capable of refusing him," said Lady Julia.

"Gertrude is capable of anything, I grant you; but, my good aunt, remember the watched pot. Lady St. Pancras alone is enough to prevent this one coming even to a simmer. If Graham went away without speaking, as you call it, lord! how I should laugh!"

"My good boy, I think he has spoken already," said Lady Julia, irritably. "If I had my way, Gertrude should have no voice in the matter."

"You think they manage these things better in France?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And yet," said Henry, thoughtfully, "marriage is a serious thing—so serious that *I* can't undertake it—and

it seems to me that to arrange one for other people involves a certain responsibility."

"I am not afraid of responsibility," said Lady Julia, magnificently.

Later on Henry remembered her words.

Gertrude wavered as a vane. If she could have looked on at herself dispassionately from the point of view of an outsider, her uncertainty would have amused her. At one moment she told herself that she cared for Graham, at another that he had come to her too late. Sometimes she was prepared to accept such a lot as was offered to her. At others the knowledge of the desperate finality of the step appalled her, and she shrank with terror from deliberately cutting herself adrift from all future possibility of intercourse with France. When she was with Graham she was drawn to him; when anything reminded her of France, she experienced a revulsion of feeling. In such a case, what was to be done?

On the second day, after reviewing her position with earnest thought, she said, "I will marry him." Then the chance sight of the stream on which she had once floated messages to the other revealed to her how little the other was forgotten. Her heart failed her. She could not cut him forever out of her life. A few hours later a merry luncheon-party at one of the Eastwood farms was amusing her, and her case lost its dire import. She found herself again unable to realize the situation. Graham devoted himself to her. She was content. What a good fellow he was, she thought again. If she married him, she would be proud of her husband. She began to think again that she would marry him. She was sorry when the carriages came round, and the

shooters made ready to continue their interrupted sport. Gertrude was driving one of the Vicarage girls in her trap, and Graham saw them off. Gertrude smiled her thanks to him as he opened the gate. Miss Mariner began to talk about him.

Wasn't he handsome? And how well he looked in his shooting things? He had a better figure than any of the other men, and she wondered who knitted those lovely heather stockings for him in which his legs looked so well. Miss Maxwell was unresponsive and preoccupied. She, too, in truth, was thinking something of the same sort, but she did not care to discuss the subject with Miss Mariner. His consideration touched her. He made no allusion to what had occurred, but tried to re-establish his relations with her upon their former footing of friendship merely.

What was she waiting for? A lover, forsooth, who was no lover—the off-chance of meeting him again. She asked herself, but with no very real sincerity, whether she had not more pride? The answer to the faltering question came without hesitation, and in a straight negative. What was pride? If France had cared for her she would have been proud to be humble before him. To herself she might own that for Woodford's silence she would have accepted any explanation, however meagre, that would have given him back to her. But the silence had continued, and explanation there came none. As she had done many times, she put the past from her and looked the present in the face. Why not let the future take care of itself? Wilfrid Graham had now a definite part in her life. She liked to have him near her. His face, with the laughing eyes,

had grown dear to her. She watched for his appearing. She liked the sound of his voice, and the sight of the well-grown limbs that suggested his strength and his healthy training.

On the morning of the third day Gertrude came down with the full intention of giving him his answer in the affirmative. A small thing put her off. Henry had found his banjo.

"And strings — actually," he said. "I didn't know I left any here."

Gertrude was silent. Henry struck a few chords and began to sing. Something called him away. Graham took up the instrument.

"You play?" said Gertrude.

"A bit."

"How can you?" said Lady St. Pancras, in protest at his modesty. "Why, you play quite beautifully, and sing, too. He really does, you know," she added, looking round.

"It is a pity you said that," said Graham, laughing, "for now, of course, I can't, and they will never know what they have missed."

Gertrude suggested, smiling, that they should be allowed to judge for themselves.

"And if we don't like it, of course we sha'n't tell you, so you won't know what we really think."

Thus encouraged, Graham laughed again, and allowed his fingers to form an air upon the strings. He was watching her face, and with the first bar he saw a curious tension of the muscles. He found himself reminded suddenly of the face of the greatest French actress of the time. Gertrude's lips were indrawn, and seemed to

grow thin, and he saw the skin tighten across the delicate bridge of her nose. The pupils of her eyes dilated. He watched her face as he sang and wondered.

"Out in the west the shadows are falling,
The red red sun sets the prairie aflame."

A coal fell from the fire and lay smoking on the hearth. Gertrude rose noiselessly and put it back. She stood then with her face averted. The song came to an end. She said nothing, nor did she give him, for that day at least, the answer she had intended.

In the afternoon Gertrude took a long and solitary walk. Graham saw her start for it, but he made no attempt to join her. If only he could have known it, so full of contradictions was her mood, that she half wished he would propose to accompany her. Some such passage as the following occurred after lunch :

"I am going for a walk."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

The word was given very firmly. Perhaps Gertrude realized this.

"I am going to the top of Eastwood Cone."

"That is the hill with the view—the view you promised to show me?"

"Yes."

He walked with her to the gate.

"You will be lonely."

"I like that sometimes."

He watched her out of sight. If, indeed, she wished him to join her, she did not make her meaning very clear. She knew this, and was angry with herself. She

was lonely—very lonely. The road wound lengthily round the hill. She followed it instead of going upward by the shorter path. What generous colors painted the autumn day! The sky was clear, with piles of woolly white cloud that later might mean rain. Here and there, like ships upon the sea, fragments of vapor detached from the larger masses sailed lightly on the blue, and when they hid the sun, the landscape that was unrolling itself beneath underwent a partial eclipse. Now, under such a one Gertrude was in shadow, while down in the valley the light gilded meadow and road. Then the sun emerged fully, and the whole earth laughed. Guns sounded in the woods, and from a heap of stones at the road-side the snapping noise of a stone-breaker's hammer marked irregularly the flight of time. Pines, like an ascending army, climbed the hill on her right, and the pleasant smell of them scented the air. A rook flapped through the empty heavens, and made a spot of deepest black upon the blue and white. Gertrude walked on, noting all these things with the appreciation of one to whom the workings of nature appeal. She could see Hatton now nestling among the elms—Hatton, where she had spent those terrible hours, during which a knowledge had come to her of an impending disaster. There was the road, along which, goaded by the strange intuition of coming misery, she had driven so furiously home.

"France, France, France!" she said to herself, aloud. Her eyes filled with tears, and through their mist she saw in the scene a curious jumble of lights and colors. She brushed her tears away presently. What was she waiting for? France was gone. Even Mrs. Woodford

was away, and thus the only source whence news of him could come was closed. She had almost cried aloud to-day, when she had realized that Graham was singing the song which was sacred to her memories of France, as to France it was sacred to his own of Essex. It had awakened in her all the dim romantic fancies which she had woven round Woodford's life in the West on that memorable occasion when she had first met him, and he had told her something of the ranch. She remembered now how he had spoken to her of his friend, even at that very early date of their acquaintance. It was his affection for the friend that had touched her. Perhaps in very deed the dead friend stood between them. Ah, these thoughts, these thoughts! Would they never leave her? And Graham was waiting so patiently. . . . She had reached her destination, and she looked round. Like a map, the surrounding country was spread out before her. She could see the roofs and spires and smoke of Parkhurst, and to the left a bit of the Manor. Farther, rising above the lower woods, she could see the red house of Harwood. Eastwood itself was hidden. The hills were purple now under a shadow. Turning round and looking westward she saw Fenton, Brabant's place. Gertrude thought of the miserable woman who had been stared out of life inside those gray walls, and she shuddered. She was lonely. Why had not Graham come with her? He was not with the shooters, unless he had since joined them. She knew that the smallest suggestion upon her own part would have made him her ready companion. She had even repelled him, and she was contrite. A sudden rush of warm feeling for him came to her, and she knew that a turning-point was

passed. She said his name below her breath—"Wilfrid." Then she said it aloud, to gauge its sound. She remembered that in just such a manner had she said the name of France—and how many times! She had wondered whether it was short for Francis, or whether it was a name in itself? . . . Even now everything led back to France. There was a wan and very hopeless look on Gertrude's face as for the last time—with such intent—she turned in the direction of the half-hidden Manor.

"Good-bye," she said, "good-bye, good-bye! I am going to try to forget you. I am going to shut you out of my life. I am going to make it a sin to think of you. I wish I could forget that I had ever seen you. You brought me great unhappiness, but I think I care for you so much that nothing that you could do would lessen my love for you—"

There was a long pause. Gertrude stood still. She did not withdraw her wistful eyes from the patch of black and white among the distant trees that was for her not the Manor, but the house where France had stayed. Her chin and mouth grew pinched, as if with cold. The wrench was very great.

"Good-bye, France! Good-bye, my dear, dear, dear France! Good-bye!"

She closed her eyes for a moment and then she turned towards home.

The sun was making ready to set. With his going down the sky looked more than ever like the sea. There was a bank of cloud that might have been a yellow stretch of sand skirting waters of the faintest greenish blue. There were peninsulas that jutted out thence, and there were bays and islands. The illusion was so

complete that Gertrude paused to watch its effect in rapt wonder. With every moment came some change of color. The sun himself, like some huge coin from a giant mint, sank in a bath of gold behind the shore. Gertrude looked at him, and looking thence was blinded as one who has looked on a god. It was some moments before the crimson disks ceased to float before her eyes, and suffered her to see clearly. When she looked again the sun was gone, leaving a dazzling rim to the clouds that hid him. The faint hues of the upper sky became more opaline in tint, and presently assumed a deeper color. The peninsulas and islands grew purple. The evening began to close in. The pines threw dark and cone-shaped shadows on the road. The sound of the guns was stilled. The stone-breaker had left his work.

Gertrude walked briskly home. Her mind was made up now, and whether she spoke to Graham that night or on the morrow the result would be the same. For the present, if you will forgive her the solecism, the past was dead. They would all be glad, she supposed—those to whom her marriage afforded any interest. Lord St. Pancras would chuckle and pat her on the back. The portly Betty would squeeze her hand in a fat clasp, and fold her to an ample bosom. Henry would congratulate her with lazy affection; and Lady Julia—Lady Julia would congratulate herself upon the success of her match-making.

CHAPTER XXVI.

No opportunity of speaking to Graham and telling him her decision occurred that evening. Something else occurred, however, which had an indirect bearing upon Gertrude's life, and will find its chronicle in this chapter.

Gertrude entered Eastwood by the back entrance. She was not in a mood for joining the others. She looked, as she passed, into the hall whence proceeded the sounds of laughter and talking. The shooters had come in, she saw, and a large party was drawn up round the tea-table near the blazing hearth. Lady St. Pancras, who had wished in vain to be a mother, was petting her nephew. Graham was submitting with graceful good temper. He alone caught sight of Gertrude as she stood for a moment at the door, but she shook her head in sign that she did not wish to be seen, and he made no comment upon her presence. She went up to her room. As she passed Henry's door she heard the sound of his banjo. He was picking out a tune—a laborious thing with him, and of uncertain result. He had found his toy which was lost, and Gertrude smiled to herself as she thought that he bid fair to make—Lady Julia thus expressed it—the night hideous with song. He would probably, as was his wont, begin again to practise when every one else wished to go to sleep.

She changed her walking-dress for a wrapper, and her boots for a pair of dainty shoes, and then having drawn

the sofa up to the fire she put thought from her and read comfortably till it was time to dress for dinner. A pleasant sense of ease and rest stole over her. Her mind was more tired than her limbs, and it was a relief to lose herself in ideas that were not her own. She was wearied with the tumult of her emotions, and now she experienced a calm such as often succeeds a storm. In the grate the flames danced round a log, and threw patches of vivid gold upon Gertrude's soft draperies. The steadier light of the candle by which she was reading hindered little the fire's wanton play upon the walls.

It seemed but a few minutes later that the dressing-bell sounded noisily through the house, and Gertrude's maid came to disturb her.

At dinner there was a vacant plate. A servant removed it hastily. Gertrude was reminded of a like incident. It was Graham this time who was absent.

"He will be back to-morrow," Lady Julia was saying, in answer to a question. "He got a telegram half an hour ago which obliged his rushing off to catch the eight o'clock express."

Some regret, in which Gertrude joined, was expressed at his absence. Its cause is immaterial to this story, and may be vaguely attributed to business. Its result, however, was to show to Gertrude how closely in a short time he had woven his life about her own, and how very much she missed him. Dinner seemed to her to pass flatly, and it was an effort to maintain a conversation which did not interest her with either of her neighbors. She became conscious that it was Graham who had been the life of her side of the table at least. He had the happiest knack of imbuing others with something of

his own natural flow of animal spirits. It was, perhaps, this trick, power, call it what you like, that had led Gertrude in the first instance to misjudge him. Where he was, there would be no flagging of talk, and no lack of laughter; not so much that he was particularly witty as that something in his personality impelled those near to him to see with his eyes, to which things revealed their humorous aspects. Possibly thus he won his popularity. Gertrude, who was closely observant, had remarked that he called forth much that was merely latent in people whom she had deemed fundamentally uninteresting. The secret of his success in this lay partly in the fact that he condemned no one unheard. One thought suggested another, and Gertrude smiled as she found herself laying one or two lessons to heart.

"I miss you," she thought; "I miss you. I want you back. I want to talk to you, and to see you."

Lady St. Pancras seized upon her after dinner, and talked in a tactless sort of way about her nephew. Lady St. Pancras's part in the conspiracy was, it may have been remarked, singularly badly played. She was like some histrionic amateur who overmarks his points, and in a subordinate role attempts far more than ever the author intended.

Wasn't Wilfrid a dear fellow? Gertrude might guess how proud they were of him. He made quite a blank at the dinner-table by his absence, didn't he? And what a good-looking fellow he was. Did Gertrude know—really this was very naughty of her (Lady St. Pancras)!—but she thought he was very hard hit in a certain quarter, and for her own part the speaker was not surprised—but oh, how naughty of her! how her

foolish tongue did wag, and how indiscreetly! Would Gertrude kiss a foolish old woman who was very fond of her, and—and forget all the stupid, stupid things she had been saying?

Gertrude, with some effort, conquered her inclination to laugh, and Lady St. Pancras made her way to Lady Julia.

"I think it will be all right," she said, with mysterious importance, and speaking in a whisper. "I have just been having a little talk with Gertrude, and I let fall one or two casual remarks about Wilfrid. I just sounded her—"

"You did what?" said Lady Julia.

"I sounded her as to her opinion of my nephew, and I gave her the most delicate little hint in the world of the position of affairs, in a very veiled way, of course, and I am always very guarded in a case of this sort."

"I hope you did no harm," said Lady Julia.

"My dear," said Lady St. Pancras, "you can trust me for that. I flatter myself I have quite a special capability of handling matters that involve a certain delicacy and finesse. I think in a thing of this sort one cannot be too careful to disguise one's own personal interest."

Lady Julia did not look convinced, and Lady St. Pancras, who, perhaps, really did feel that upon this occasion her zeal had got the better of her discretion, laid yet further stress upon her supposed possession of qualities of policy and tact. By ten o'clock she had persuaded herself, at least, that she was a fully-qualified diplomatist.

It was about an hour later that, as the ladies were preparing to retire, there occurred the incident which caused Henry Maxwell to remember his aunt's words

with regard to her indifference to responsibility. There was a sound of wheels on the drive.

"Who, at this hour?" said Lady Julia. She put down the work she was rolling up.

Lady St. Pancras paused on her way across the room.

"More visitors, Julia? You keep open house."

"I don't expect any one to-night."

"Perhaps it is Mr. Graham," suggested some one.

Gertrude went to a window which commanded a view of the door, and disappeared behind the curtains and the blind.

"It is a fly from Parkhurst," she announced, "and it can't be Mr. Graham, for there is a trunk."

The front-door bell rang loudly.

"I wish I could see," said Gertrude. "Now they are getting out. It is a lady and another—no, a maid, I think."

"An arrival?" said Lady Julia; "but I expect no one, unless the Hurlinghams have mistaken the day."

"It isn't Lady Hurlingham," said Gertrude; "she's as tall as you, and as fat as"—she was going to say Lady St. Pancras, but she recollected herself in time to substitute for the name, "possible"—"as fat as possible. This is some one slight. We shall know in a minute."

"We are vulgarly curious," said Henry, "even to the extent of spying behind blinds."

Gertrude threw a cushion at him gently, with some retort which, without much analysis, showed itself to be of the *tu quoque* order. Henry told her so, and some brother-and-sisterly sparring ensued, in the course of which the door was opened, and the butler announced:

"Lady Beckenham."

There was a pause. All eyes were turned towards the door. Lady Julia moved forward as she heard her niece's name.

"What can have brought Kate here at this hour?" she said, half to herself, half to the others.

Gertrude was conscious of something dramatic in the situation. She did not yet know what was about to happen, but there was that in the hour of the unexpected arrival, and in the sudden grouping of the people, their faces all turned in one direction in expectancy and curiosity, that reminded her of some tense moment in a play. The suggestion was carried out, even to the entering of Lady Beckenham a few seconds after the announcement of her name. Lady Beckenham was very pretty, very small, with a childish face, and a somewhat helpless cast of countenance. She hurried forward and kissed her aunt. Then she looked round in a bewildered sort of way, to pick out such faces as she knew.

"How do you do, Gertrude? Henry, I didn't see you. Lady St. Pancras, how do you do?"

"My dear Kate," said Lady Julia, "this is very unexpected. We are, of course, all very glad to see you, but — what on earth brings you here? You are only just in time to find us up. Have you dined?"

"I don't want anything. I had a sandwich. I suppose it does seem extraordinary. I forgot you had the house full, and I didn't know where else to go."

Gertrude was helping her cousin to divest herself of her coat.

"Your eye, Kate!" she said, suddenly. "What have you done to your eye, you poor little thing?"

Lady Beckenham had been nervously unfastening her

veil. Gertrude saw her lips begin to tremble. On the white flesh there was a heavy bruise.

"That's what brings me," cried Lady Beckenham, with a sudden burst of tears. "He hit me. I don't care who knows. I don't care, I don't care, I don't care, I hate him! I have always hated him. They made me marry him, and now I am going to divorce him!"

There was a low murmur of compassion for the poor little wife. Lady St. Pancras threatened to become hysterical. Gertrude and her brother exchanged glances and looked instinctively at their aunt. Each had a nervous inclination to laugh. Henry turned away to hide a smile.

"This is very painful," Lady Julia said, as soon as she could find a steady voice in which to speak. "I hope every one will excuse you. You are overdone tonight, dear. You had better come to your room."

The kindness of her tone did her some credit. Gertrude, who saw her privately later on, knew the effort it must have cost her. Then, Lady Julia's aspect had somewhat changed. The genial curves had gone from her face, which was hard and forbidding.

"The scandal!" she said. "Before a house full of people. The indecency of the whole thing. . . !"

CHAPTER XXVII.

It was at about one o'clock that there was a knock at Gertrude's door. She had been expecting the sound, and she lay in her dressing-gown curled up on the sofa before the fire. She jumped to her feet and drew for-

'ward a huge arm-chair, in which, when her little cousin had settled herself with a sigh of comfort, she looked like a child.

"Aunt Julia's very angry," she said, as her first remark.

"Well, she is a bit," said Gertrude, smiling; "but that doesn't matter."

"I don't care whether it matters or not. It was rather—rather vulgar of me to make a scene, wasn't it? But I don't always stop to think. I am sorry if I disgraced Aunt Julia; but I can't help being glad, too—for she made me marry him. Am I much disfigured?"

Gertrude was again conscious of an inclination to laugh. Lady Beckenham, sitting in the huge chair in a number of nondescript garments (the flight had been too hurried for discriminate packing) presented a very comical aspect. At first she had suggested to Gertrude a little child, now it was a large doll—and a doll dressed by a child. She wore a night-gown, over which she had tied a petticoat to keep her warm as she crossed the passage; for the same reason, perhaps, she had a cloth coat that belonged to a walking costume, and over all an Indian shawl.

"I caught up the first thing I could see as soon as Aunt Julia left my room," she said, in explanation of her extraordinary attire. "I thought she would never go. I believe she had been to you first?"

"Yes, she came in here," said Gertrude.

"To talk over me with you?" asked Lady Beckenham.

Gertrude nodded.

"She may talk over me as much as she likes," said

Lady Beckenham, with a show of firmness that deceived neither Gertrude nor herself, "but she won't talk me over. She wants me to go back to him. And I never, never, never will!"

"Let me lend you a dressing-gown," said Gertrude; "you can't be comfortable in all those odds and ends."

Her cousin shook her head.

"Don't move. It would disturb us both. I am quite comfortable enough, and it is only for to-night. My things will be sent to-morrow. I came away in a great hurry, you know; and if I stay here—or, indeed, in any case—my maid will go to Lesham early to-morrow and fetch my things. *He* is going to Paris, and so he will be out of the way."

"What happened, you poor little woman?" asked Gertrude. As yet, though she knew them to be very real, she could not take her cousin's troubles seriously.

"Everything," said Lady Beckenham, comprehensively—"everything. *I* have a case that would convince every jury that ever was got together; and, oh Gertrude, it is horrible of me, I am glad! Are you shocked?" she added as an afterthought, and contemplating Miss Maxwell out of the corners of her eyes.

"I know you have had to put up with a great deal," said Gertrude, after a pause. She was watching a cave that had formed itself in the fire, and wondering how soon the glowing walls would fall in.

"I can talk quietly now, you know," said Lady Beckenham, "because here I feel safe, and you are my dear friend, Gertrude; but I cried almost all the way in the train, Janet will tell you so; and—oh, Gerty, you don't know all I have gone through!"

"I can guess."

"And I have stood it all for more than three years. Is my eye much swollen? It is a pity, isn't it, for I have rather pretty eyes?"

Gertrude raised herself on her arm and leaned over towards the dressing-table, whence she managed to take a hand-glass. She gave it to her cousin and watched her with some amusement as she contemplated her features by the light of the fire.

"I have often seen black eyes before," said Lady Beckenham; "they seem to be presented to poor women by their husbands pretty frequently, and I have wondered what it felt like to be given one. I know now. You think at first that all possible pain has concentrated itself in your eyeball, and that your eye itself has been pushed back into your head. After that you see stars."

Lady Beckenham continued to consult the mirror. With a very white and delicate finger she gently touched the angry bruise that constituted part of her "case." She smiled at her reflection, and the exact balance having gone from her face by the magpie effects of black and white, her smile presented a curious aspect.

"How funny I look!" she cried, convulsed with sudden merriment. "How funny! Look at me, Gertrude; did you ever see anything so funny? Oh, you funny, funny little closed-up eye! You are no relation to the other. I am like an advertisement of a soap—a nigger washed partly white, or a sweep or something. I know I have seen a picture of the sort."

Gertrude caught her cousin's suggestion, and the two young women laughed till they could laugh no more.

Lady Beckenham rocked her shaking little body in the great arm-chair, and Gertrude buried her face in the cushions of the sofa to control the sounds of mirth that came from her lips. Twice the paroxysm of merriment seemed about to pass and broke out afresh. An exchange of glances was enough to renew the peals of laughter, the effort to suppress which added so materially to their heartiness.

It was only by degrees that the storm subsided, and left two exhausted young women with faces tremulous, and ready at the smallest provocation to avail themselves again of that form of relief with which nature has endowed the young.

Gertrude felt a gain in mind and body. It was very long since she had laughed heartily at anything, and the grotesqueness and inappropriateness of her recent exercise of the risible faculties had, like the effort to suppress it, only given to it an added zest.

"What's that?" said Lady Beckenham, pausing in the act of putting down the little silver-backed looking-glass which, in its passage through the air, sent a golden dart of firelight across the ceiling.

A dismal twanging broke the silence of the night.

"Henry's banjo," said Gertrude.

"Why does he play the 'Lost Chord?'" Lady Beckenham asked, after a pause, during which the tune declared itself feebly. Whether the sounds had a depressing effect or not, I cannot say, but there were no more expressions of mirth that night in Gertrude's room. Lady Beckenham's troubles were anything but imaginary, and presently, as Gertrude had half expected, their weight cast its gloom over the little woman in the big chair.

"I wonder what you think of me?" she said, after a long pause, during which her little face had been lengthening. "I haven't made a very dignified picture of a wronged wife. I think you understand me, Gertrude. I may laugh as I have been laughing, but I am miserable—oh, I am miserable. I have had three years that I wonder have not crushed every laugh out of me. I have cried myself to sleep many, many nights. What did he marry me for if he did not mean to be faithful to me? He hasn't even made a pretence of it. Everybody knew the sort of man he was. I know that now. Aunt Julia must have known, and she made me marry him. And oh, Gertrude, one of the things that makes my life most unbearable is that people let me see that they know! They don't mean it unkindly, some of them. They want to show me that they are sorry for me, but it galls me. Perhaps I am too sensitive. You see, I am not a woman of the world. I never was. I never shall be. I know many women in my own position who manage to be happy enough. He gives me plenty of money, and I have everything I want; but, then, I don't feel as if I wanted anything. You know I hate him! I hate his face with its good features, that are getting bloated, and its handsome eyes, that are generally bloodshot. It repels me when I wake up opposite to it in the morning. I hate the smell of the whiskey that he begins the day with. He is irritable always early in the morning. We have pretty little scenes at breakfast. It must be very edifying to the servants, I think. I used to be ashamed, now I don't much care. I have had time to get accustomed to it. Even from the most trifling point of view, it is so uncomfortable.

We change our servants so constantly. They won't submit to being sworn at. Why should they? I generally take their part, and then he swears at me. I live in such a noisy atmosphere. I dare say it sounds a horrible sort of thing to say, but he ought never to have married. There are noisy women in the world, who don't ask for marriage, and who have no fine feelings to be jarred. Oh, Gertrude, I would give something to be my old self again—to be the girl who was, perhaps, more ignorant of the world than most girls! I know so much that is ugly now. The knowledge is inevitable to the life I live. Sometimes the very servants themselves have offered me pity. Think of that, Gertrude—think of it!—and sometimes . . . There was a housemaid I had, a very handsome girl, who was impertinent to me. I threatened to tell my husband of her conduct, and she laughed in my face. I told Beckenham, and he said I was jealous of her beauty . . . the insult!—and I knew that there was a greater insult behind that. These things are hideous to speak of, then what must the indignity of them be to bear! I am younger than you, Gertrude, and think of what I have gone through! I wasn't a commonplace girl either. I had ideals. I thought of marriage as a sacred tie; now it seems to me a pretty name for an ugly thing. . . ."

Lady Beckenham paused. The glowing cave in the fire fell in with a little crash. To Gertrude, in the small figure in the big chair there was no longer any suggestion of a child or a doll. With the story of her three years' bondage, Lady Beckenham's face seemed to have grown older. Something of the dignity of suffer-

ing invested the little features with an air of nobility belonging to one of statelier presence.

"I don't know why he married me," she continued, presently. "I am not a bit his style, though, of course, I know I am pretty—not just now, perhaps, with an eye like a—like a—"

"Prize-fighter," suggested Gertrude.

"—like a prize-fighter," said Lady Beckenham, with a slight inclination of her head; "but I am normally quite pretty in a small significant sort of way. I am not his style. He didn't want money, and I hadn't any to speak of if he did. And there isn't enough of me to look dignified at the top of a table in the huge rooms at Lesham or in Grosvenor Square. I think he just took a sudden fancy to me, and followed it up because I did not wish it. He got Aunt Julia on his side at once—"

Here Gertrude interrupted her cousin to say laconically:

"Dare say she did not want much getting."

Lady Beckenham smiled.

"She married her niece brilliantly," she said, shortly.

The fire fell lower in the grate. The sounds of the banjo ceased. A dog was whining dismally somewhere within ear-range of the house.

"I suppose my story is not an uncommon one, nor will cease to be common as long as marriages are made for convenience," continued Lady Beckenham. "I could name half a dozen women in cases like mine. Of course, my case might be worse. I know a woman married to just such a — such a profligate as my husband, and she adores him. Think of that, Gertrude! I can't be too

thankful that I do not care for Beckenham. If I did I think my life would kill me — paradox! I could not live with the knowledge that the ties that bound me absolutely were to him no ties at all. Look here, Gertrude, I would have cared for him if he had let me. Everybody knows how unwillingly I married him; but once I was married, I determined to try to love him. I thought then, you must remember, that he really cared for me. I reproached myself with my coldness, and I looked at him and said to myself that he was my husband, that henceforth we were one, that the step we had taken was irrevocable, and that I had sworn to love him. You have seen Beckenham, you know how good-looking he is, or, at least, how good-looking he would be if he lived a healthier life; he is growing coarse now. I remember so well looking at him in the train that took us away for our honeymoon. I remember the suit he wore —a check suit. I remember the touch of the nap when I went and sat beside him. I remember the cap he wore pulled down onto his forehead. I remember remarking what a beautiful nose he had—straight, finely-cut, and what a smooth line of cheek and chin, and—I was proud of him. I had never looked at him before to see what I thought of him. He was at his best then, or, at least, he had not long passed his best. He was a splendid specimen of an Englishman. I look back now, and I am amazed at the difference three years have made in his appearance. I don't think he was coarse then as he is now. But the work of his forty years must have begun at that time, or it could not have advanced so rapidly. I was ready to love him that day . . . a month later, I came back to Lesham loathing him, and appalled

by the knowledge that I was bound to him for the term of my natural life.

Lady Beckenham spoke in a low and even tone. She kept her eyes upon the glowing embers of the fire, and Gertrude tried to realize the pictures that were presented to her cousin as she spoke.

"You don't really know him," said Lady Beckenham, after another pause. "He has been on his good behavior whenever you and Aunt Julia have stayed with us at Lesham. Oh, I don't want to make the case against him worse than it really is. I dare say the fault is partly mine. I am not the sort of wife for him. I said before, I know lots of women would manage to be happy enough in an arrangement for each to go his and her own way. He isn't worse than many other men — and, Gertrude, don't imagine that he knocks me about. He doesn't. He may have bullied me and laughed at me and swore at me—I know a few choice expressions, I can tell you! —but he has never laid a finger on me till to-day—yesterday, I suppose it is yesterday now."

The clock on the mantel-piece ticked loudly, and drew attention to the flight of time. It seemed to Gertrude as if the sound had but at that moment begun. From the dressing-table there came the more rapid ticking of a watch. Gertrude was reminded by its feverish energy of some young thing working off its superabundant zeal. The slower movement of the clock's pendulum suggested the more staid life of middle age.

When next she looked at her companion the tears were rolling down Lady Beckenham's face.

"I said just now," said Lady Beckenham, "that my experience of marriage was that it was a decent name

used to cover a hideous thing. I said something of that sort; but oh, Gertrude, what might not marriage be if it were with some one one loved? I wish—I wish I could have my life over again, and they might talk themselves black in the face—not the most brilliant match in the world would tempt me. I don't want to put all the blame of my unhappiness upon my husband. Gertrude, it is an awful thing to marry one man, loving another."

A sudden shiver ran through Gertrude. She lay back with closed eyes.

"I tried to forget him," said Lady Beckenham, in a very low voice. "I tried honestly to forget him. I prayed. He went abroad, you know, after that time when I jilted him—jilted him!—I, who would have died for him. But I never forgot him. It is nonsense to think one can forget if one has really cared. I never forgot him. Perhaps that made me colder to the man I was made to marry. Let me try to be fair. My misery has not been entirely the result of my husband's infidelity. If he has made no pretence of being faithful either in the letter or the spirit, I have broken my vows in the spirit if not in the letter. There I am human, and I blame circumstance partly, while a stronger woman would only blame herself. I am not strong."

Gertrude said nothing. At this moment she could not have found a steady voice with which to speak.

Lady Beckenham wiped the tears from her eyes, which filled again. She buried her small face in her handkerchief. After a time she roused herself.

"You have lost all your beauty-sleep for to-night," she said, with a damp smile. "It was scarcely fair to keep you up and inflict all my woes upon you. But I

had to tell some one—I am so unhappy. Oh, I am so unhappy!"

Her tears fell afresh. Gertrude rose and knelt beside the big chair.

"I don't know what to say to you," she said, gently. "But please know how sorry I am. You do know, don't you? I was always sorry. You poor little thing—I wish I could comfort you. I wish I could help you."

"You do comfort me, but you can't help me. No one can help me, unless—as I intend, in a weak, uncertain sort of way—I take extreme measures and sue for a divorce. I do not mean to be talked round; but I can't tell; I dare say I shall be. Aunt Julia is very persuasive and very plausible, and I feel like a toy in her hands. I wish I had the strength to act for myself. She made me marry him; she will probably prevent my divorcing him. I am tired now, and I am going to try to sleep and forget the whole thing. I can't think out my position to-night. It is dreadful to be so helpless, isn't it? But it is my nature, and nothing will alter that. Good-night, dear; I am better for my talk."

Lady Beckenham rose. She stretched her arms, and then clasped her hands behind her head.

"What a long time it seems since we laughed! How we laughed! Well, good-night. I am at least useful as a warning, Gertrude. Keep your future in your own hands whatever you do."

She drew her shawl more closely round her throat and moved towards the door. She opened it, and then stood still, holding the handle. Gertrude had followed her across the room. The night had become colder. Lady Beckenham lingered, seeming loath to go.

"And when you marry," she said, speaking now in a half whisper, and pausing to peer out into the black passage—"when you marry be quite certain—yes, I must go now—be quite certain, even if you don't care for your husband, that you don't care for any one else."

Gertrude made no answer. She was standing with her thumbs thrust into the girdle of her wrapper.

Lady Beckenham lingered for a few more minutes in a desultory indecision that was characteristic of her, and then, after another announcement of her intention of going to bed and a short interval of silence, which Gertrude did not break, she went down the passage to her room.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A TELEGRAM from Graham in the morning announced his intention of remaining for another twenty-four hours in London. His business necessitated his further presence.

Under any other circumstances than those, the position of which was causing Lady Julia so much anxiety and annoyance, she might have been provoked that a break should occur in the progress of relations between him and Gertrude at a time when matters seemed to be nearing a climax. Gertrude's future, however, sank into unimportance beside the gravity of the case of Lady Beckenham. Henry and his sister could not resist a chuckle at the thought that the bread which Lady Julia had cast upon the waters should have returned to her in so unpalatable a form. Lady Beckenham herself main-

tained an attitude of helpless inactivity. She did not even send her maid to fetch her boxes from Lesham. She had, it seemed, no power of acting for herself, and though she knew that her one chance of happiness lay in a passage through the Court of Divorce, she had the conviction that she would be able to take no steps in the face of her aunt's opposition. She sat still, feeling that something ought to be done. Gertrude, who did not wish to interfere, went only to the length of suggesting that Lady Beckenham, if she was in earnest, should communicate with her solicitors. Lady Beckenham did not know the name of the firm; and, besides, she did not know whether she was in earnest. Divorce was so dreadful. She did not know whether she could ever face all that an institution of proceedings would involve. Then she laughed a little at her indecision, and after that she cried.

Henry, in discussing his cousin with Gertrude, said that she was a dear little thing, of course; but the most unmitigated little fool he had ever met.

"She doesn't know her own mind for two seconds," he said. "I dare say Beckenham's a blackguard; indeed, I have no doubt of it; but I had rather be married to almost any one than poor little Kate."

Gertrude admitted that Lady Beckenham was somewhat trying.

"But the odd thing about these undecided people is," she added, "that they infect one with their own uncertainty. I am absolutely unable to give her any advice. For one thing, I don't think she would take it; and, for another, after ten minutes' talk with Kate, I see the thing from both sides, too."

To the helpless little woman, however, Gertrude was all that is kind. She understood her, perhaps, better than most people, and she had her confidence. It had been something in the nature of a revelation to her to learn that Lady Beckenham was still unhappy for her little barrister, and, in Gertrude's mood of the time, it added considerably to the interest of her cousin's story. She could not help a certain feeling of irritation at Lady Beckenham's inability to rise to the occasion, but she tempered her irritation with pity. The helplessness and weakness and indecision were so plainly radical that it was useless to expect any powerful coping with a difficult situation. Lady Beckenham was fully conscious of the defect in her character, and her resigned acceptance of it as a fact was at once provoking and pathetic. As often as Gertrude found her exasperation ousting her sympathy, a glance at the baby face with its bruise, or a recollection of the spontaneous laughter of the night before, softened her. It seemed to Gertrude that, alone with her in her room, Lady Beckenham had presented an aspect different from that which she now wore. After the outburst of merriment at her own expense, she had talked rationally enough, and Gertrude remembered how, with the narration of her sufferings, she had assumed a quiet dignity of which even her odd garments could not rob her. Was not her helplessness only an added suffering? From her heart Gertrude pitied her.

Lady Beckenham sat for the most part in Lady Julia's sitting-room. She felt, and was conscious of looking, like some child in disgrace, whose punishment or discipline had not yet been decided. Her breakfast and her luncheon were brought up to her, and she was visited by

such of the guests as were sufficiently intimate with her to warrant their intrusion to her privacy. Lady St. Pancras squeezed her hand or held and patted it. She nodded her head and said:

"We won't talk of it, my dear. We just won't talk of it. We'll wait a little, and see what happens. The whole subject shall be sealed between us."

Notwithstanding this avowed intention, she asked a good many questions and gained no little information, and when Lady Beckenham had satisfied such curiosity as was manifested in the queries, Lady St. Pancras said again:

"We won't speak of it, dear. We just won't speak of it. We'll wait a little and see what happens; and I am sure when it comes to the time we shall do whatever is right. Won't we, dear?"

"I hope so," said Lady Beckenham, tearfully accepting the old lady's portly embrace.

"I have no doubt of it," said Lady St. Pancras; "no doubt whatever. I know we shall remember that we are very young and inexperienced, and we shall take the advice of older heads than our own."

From which Gertrude, who happened to be present, gathered that during Lady Beckenham's inactivity her aunt was not equally inactive. She knew, indeed—and Lady Beckenham knew it as well—that the little that had been said by Lady Julia to her fugitive niece did not necessarily mean that matters were being allowed to take their own course. Lady Beckenham had sat during the morning in nervous expectation of an interview with her aunt—an interview as to the issue of which the poor little wife had no doubts whatever. She was as

wax in Lady Julia's hands. But the hours passed, and no such interview as Lady Beckenham anticipated took place. Her aunt went in and out of the room good-humoredly, and made few comments upon the subject uppermost in everybody's mind. She asked most kindly after her niece's health and so on, applied a lotion to the bruise, thought it was less swollen than before, and was, in public at least, generally normal. To her guests she was making light of the whole thing. She spoke of a little quarrel, a trifling dispute, a box meant for the ears of a provoking child, and missing its aim, regrets and reconciliations already in progress. Telegrams, Gertrude knew, were passing between Eastwood and Lesham, and she foresaw clearly the conclusion of the whole matter. The guests outwardly accepted Lady Julia's explanations, and probably made their own comments pretty freely behind her back. Be this as it may, later on paragraphs found their way into such of the papers as make it their business to chronicle scandal.

Lady Beckenham, out of suspense with regard to the dreadful interview with her aunt, wondered what was going to be done. She wished that she was like any one else, and competent to act upon her own responsibility. If she could work herself up into a passion—such a passion, for instance, as had nerved and enabled her to quit her husband's house on the previous day—there might be some possibility of her asserting her own will in defiance of that of Lady Julia. But even anger seemed to have forsaken her. She did not feel rebellious. Her wrongs seemed distant, and her hatred of her husband lost, in his absence, something of its keenness, and failed to rouse her to action. A sort of

apathy had come over her. She felt utterly alone. Her circumstances were scarcely those in which a young and unmarried woman could help her, and Gertrude was, at Eastwood at least, the only person of her own sex from whom she could have sought aid in her trouble. It was improbable that Lady Julia would consent to countenance all the scandal connected with legal proceedings. Lady Beckenham told herself that she must have known that before she started for Eastwood at all. Then why had she come to Eastwood when the strong presence of her aunt paralyzed her? Among her friends she had many whose houses would have been open to her, and who, unbiased by family prejudices, would ably have tendered their advice. In the face of this knowledge she had deliberately taken herself to a very stronghold of the enemy. Here, and she was conscious of it, was another instance of her inability to think for herself. Eastwood had been her home before marriage, and in the emergency no other refuge suggested itself. She was blindly timid. As a child she had been taught to swim, but the probability is that if she had now been plunged suddenly into deep water she would have gone to the bottom with scarcely an effort to save herself. Even in the learning she had required constant exhortation from her swimming-master to strike out and trust herself to herself. As in things physical, so in things moral, she was entirely dependent upon others. So dependent did she seem upon approval and encouragement that Gertrude wondered that she should have succeeded even indifferently in such duties as must inevitably have fallen to her lot as Lord Beckenham's wife. But Gertrude, who stood in no awe of her aunt,

and was fully competent to hold her own and fight her own battle, did not realize the numbing effect which Lady Julia exercised over the will of her younger niece. Lady Beckenham was powerless to shake it off. It was magnetic, she thought, this influence of Lady Julia's, and it permeated the house; consequently poor Kate, absolutely susceptible to it, appeared at Eastwood at her very weakest. Something of this she said to Gertrude.

"I present a very sorry figure, I know," she said, humbly. "The curious thing is that at Lesham I am far better able to fight for myself than here. I can be as rude to Beckenham in our quarrels as he is to me, and I often get my own way. I have refused to obey him in lots of things. You who see me here would hardly believe that. But whether you believe it or not, it is true. It is Aunt Julia who is making me look such a fool. I can't explain it, and I do not suppose she could explain it, either, but she overpowers me. She cows me!"

Gertrude smiled and shook her head, in token that she did not understand.

"Aunt Julia is very strong, I grant you," she said, "but to me she is too transparent to have any real power. I find at Eastwood I can do pretty much as I like, and if I couldn't, I would," she added, paradoxically.

"We are differently constituted, you and I," said Lady Beckenham. "When I lived with Aunt Julia, I did exactly as I was told, and I suppose I have not changed much since then."

Then once more Lady Beckenham's sense of humor

evoked another outburst of merriment at her own expense.

"It is such waste of a black eye, isn't it?" she said. "It was the one thing I wanted to complete my case. And I may never have another."

Gertrude joined in the laughter. More than ever she felt the difficulty of taking Lady Beckenham's woes seriously.

The afternoon passed quietly as the morning. Gertrude, at Lady Julia's suggestion, took her cousin for a walk, and at tea Lady Beckenham appeared with the rest in the drawing-room. People looked at her curiously, and expressed their sympathy by their manner.

It was about six o'clock when the butler came to Lady Julia with some message, which caused her to leave the room. Gertrude saw Lady Beckenham grow pale. She evidently connected the incident with herself. Gertrude, under pretext of showing her some photographs, took her cousin into the inner room. There Lady Beckenham clutched her hand.

"Gertrude, what shall I do?" she said, in a frenzied whisper; "I am certain my husband is here. I am certain of it. I am sure he is with Aunt Julia now. She will send for me, and I haven't made up my mind. Oh, how I have wasted this day! If I could only hide—"

She began to tremble so violently that Gertrude pulled a chair forward with her foot, and gently helped the shaking form into it.

"Kate!" she said, hurriedly—"Kate, don't be frightened! It is not too late. If you are undecided, refuse to give an answer yet. Be firm, dear!"

"I can't," said Lady Beckenham; "I can't. Oh, I am frightened! I am frightened! Why have I let things drift all day? I knew Aunt Julia must be doing something when she said so little. I am sure she has telegraphed for him. I am sure he is here. If I go back, it will all begin again. I have had my chance, and I have missed it. Oh, Gertrude, I may have laughed, but I am so unhappy! I am so unhappy!"

At dinner Lady Julia said:

"She is on her way back to Lesham at this moment with her husband. It was all very unfortunate, of course, but in the end it arranged itself quite amicably in a complete reconciliation. Poor Kate is so impulsive. I am sure she more than half regretted rushing off here in the heat of the moment. He was very contrite, poor fellow, for his share in the squabble. I suppose these little disagreements must occur sometimes. However, I am glad to say they went off quite happily."

Gertrude remembered the convulsive and tearful embrace with which her cousin had taken leave of her, and she looked sceptical.

CHAPTER XXIX.

It seemed to Gertrude that the thread of her own story had been broken by the events of the past two days. There had been, indeed, after the dramatic entrance of the fugitive wife at Eastwood no time for her to give much thought to such matters as concerned her-

self. Lady Beckenham had naturally engrossed her attention. As has been said, it was with some difficulty that she forced herself to realize the gravity of her cousin's situation. The elements that contributed to form Lady Beckenham's character were so abnormal that Gertrude could not accept her case as typical of those of such wronged wives as had always enlisted her sympathies. After the confidences of the night, when Gertrude had been really moved, it was not till just before her cousin's departure that her keenest pity had been stirred. In the interval a certain contempt, which she could not restrain, had possessed her for the weakness of a mind that could not compose itself to any course of action. But in the inner room, with the incident of Lady Beckenham's sudden terror, as she realized that she had let the precious time slip by, and that her husband had been sent for, and had arrived, Gertrude had experienced a deep compassion for her, and a sharp remorse for her own share in an indecision that had allowed an emergency to arise which the poor little wife was unprepared to meet. She could not, of course, be responsible for her cousin's natural failings, but she might at least have so discussed matters with her as to have insured that Lady Beckenham should be ready with her answer in any crisis that might arrive. As it was, she had done nothing, and this partly because, as she had told her brother, Lady Beckenham had infected her with something of her own uncertainty. Henry refused to have anything to do with the affair. Lady Julia was, of course, on the side of conventionalities. It was natural that she did not wish to be party to the washing of the Beckenham dirty linen, particularly since, at

the time of the marriage, she must have known that it was anything but spotless. So, thrown back upon herself, and suddenly confronted with a husband who, with less or more grace, expressed a certain contrition—the admission that he had erred being qualified by an allusion to extenuating circumstances, which Lady Julia declared, indulgently, that she could well conceive—Lady Beckenham listened to certain advice which was subsequently administered to her by her aunt somewhat in the form of a command, and submitted to the dictates of the only strong will brought to bear upon the case.

Gertrude knew pretty well the state of affairs existing between the departing couple, and she smiled quietly to herself when she heard it called by the name of reconciliation.

On the third day she was free once more to take up the threads of her own life. Then, when she began afresh that process of introspection that had become so much a matter of habit to her, she found that, unknown to herself, her feelings had been undergoing a change. She happened, in looking for something that she required, to open the drawer in which lay France Woodfood's rose. To her great surprise she found herself able to look at it without experiencing that sudden and sharp pain with which the sight of it had always stabbed her. She took up the flower, now so dried and stiff. A faint scent still hung about the petals. She held the stalk closely, while her thoughts reverted to France Woodford. What had come to her that she could not see his face as clearly as heretofore? He seemed distant, vague—a memory of which time has effaced the definiteness

of the outlines. She could think of him calmly, as a mother can think of a child long dead. For a time she was frightened almost at the apparent significance of her present state. She knew, and in the early days after her awakening had laughed at, the French proverb, "*Amant parti, amant guéri.*" Its teaching had seemed to her untrue, futile. Was she going to learn that for her, at least, it was a text upon which to preach a sermon? She did not like to face the question. She put back the flower hurriedly into its place, and locked the drawer. Some one spoke of Wilfrid Graham. Gertrude found herself wishing for his return. A thought of Brabant occurred to her. It was occasioned by the portrait that bore a resemblance to him, and she began to wonder whether he was away. Many days had elapsed since last she had seen him. Her life seemed mapped out in periods, which were dominated by some one leading influence. She thought of those ugly days during which the shadow of his wild passion had dogged her path. A certain morbid interest in his ill-balanced nature led her to ponder upon his absence from Eastwood. She knew that he had a running invitation to join the shooters. That he had not availed himself of it had been a relief to her, but it afforded her some surprise. Possibly the wish to hear something of his movements caused her to direct her mare's steps to the post-office. For once, however, Mrs. Peck was in no mood for gossip. Gertrude gathered from the appearance of the door-way of the shop that something unusual had happened. Mrs. Peck was the centre of a small crowd of neighbors. She had eyes red with weeping, and she held forth at some length.

"Fourteen come New-year's Day — first of the month and first of the year and first of the week, too —first day. I took to bed on a Sunday. I remember it as well as well. Peck 'ad gone to church, and they 'ad to send for him, and I remember as well as well, he says, 'Is it a boy?' Lizer an' Jane being both girls, we was hoping for a boy, and a boy it was. Oh, only to think of it!"

Gertrude made her way to where the woman was standing. Half a dozen of the by-standers volunteered information.

"It's her Tommy, miss," said the least diffuse; "he's lost — never been home all night, nor been seen nor heard of. 'Ave you looked in the well, Mrs. Peck? He was always such a one for playing with water."

"Ah, I'd look there," said another; "boys are all alike; give 'em a drop of water to wet theirselves with, and they're quite 'appy. I'd look in the well."

"P'raps he's run away to sea," suggested a third comforter. "My Willie 'ad a boy as done that, and they never see him alive again, owing to his being wrecked in a storm. Some boys are that set on going to sea, ain't they?"

"'E's a big boy of his age," said another, "or else he might 'a' bin kidnapped. But there's no knowing. There's a lot of rough characters about this time of the year, and they might 'a' drugged 'im, you know. It's enough to frighten anybody. I don't blame you for being upset, Mrs. Peck. I've buried four meself, and I know what it is. I shall never forget the day the baby died, through falling into a tub of scalding water. I've seen trouble, I 'ave."

"When did you see your boy last?" asked Gertrude, addressing the postmistress.

"Four o'clock yesterday, miss. I give him his tea with the others, same as usual, and he went out directly afterwards. I was minding the shop, and I says, 'Tommy, don't be out late,' I says, because I wanted him 'elp his father with some sortin', and he says, 'All right, mother,' he says, and from that to this I've never set eyes on him."

"Where is Mr. Peck?"

"Peck's gone off to Parkhurst to acquaint the police. He was always a good boy, was Tommy, though a bit wilful. You see, as I always says to Peck, the orfice interferes with my domesticative duties. There was Polly, as stunted her growth through eating acid-drops. Never 'ad one out of her mouth, and me too busy to notice it, till the doctor drawed my attention to it. Oh, my poor Tommy! Such a difficulty as I 'ad to rare him! He was delicate from a baby, and was very backward with his teeth, and not over-strong about the lungs, which he gets from his father. Peck's family all suffered from chests — mine's was liver and brain. And I thought he'd 'a' died of whooping-cough; but he had his measles better than any of the other children, that I will say, bar Matilda, as has everything light and sickens last. An' such a daring boy he was! Many an' many's the time me 'eart's stood still in me mouth to see 'im a climbin' after birds' nesses."

"'E's 'ad a fall, you may depend," said one of the comforters, with conviction. "My 'Arry lamed 'isself that way."

"There's no birds' nests this time of the year," said

the woman who had "seen trouble." "I think its a deal likelier as he's spiked himself on railings, or p'r'aps he's slipped somewhere and broke his leg, like that man did last year on Mr. 'Arwood's land, and died from exposure, through laying out all night, and nobody 'earing him, for all he 'ollered himself exhausted. No, I don't wonder at you being anxious, Mrs. Peck. I say its enough to make you. I've buried four, I 'ave, and I know what it is."

"He ain't in the well," said an officious searcher, returning.

"To think of him missing," said the landlady of the King's Arms, "and I see him only yesterday, when he come for the dinner-beer and served him meself. So well he looked, too; for I said to William, I said, 'He gets stronger, don't he? More fat in the face?' Didn't I, William?"

"Yes 'm, you did. I remember because I give him change for a sixpence."

"That's true," said Mrs. Peck, tearfully, "for I 'adn't a copper in the house."

She turned to Gertrude.

"We've been up all night, miss, his father and me. We was expecting him 'ome every minute. Peck made certain as he'd gone into Parkhurst, for I give him a penny last week, and Lizzie say she knew he wanted to buy a whip-top with it. You can't get only peg-tops in the village, so we thought he'd sure to have gone to the toyshop; but ten o'clock come, and then eleven, and no Tommy. So I sent Peck in to Parkhurst, and he 'ad to ring 'em up at the shop, and he'd never been there; and ever since we've been scouring the

whole place for him. I've scarcely been able to stir meself, because I can't leave the office; and the baby's teething, and I'm that put about I don't know what to do."

Gertrude saw that there was nothing to be done, so after administering such comfort as the circumstances of the case permitted, she rode away.

The day was damp and depressing. Like the woman who had seen trouble, Gertrude was not surprised that Mrs. Peck should be overwhelmed with anxiety. She could herself think of no very hopeful explanation for the boy's absence, and, still exercising herself with the problem, she came to a place where four roads met. The village lay behind her; Eastwood, by a circuitous route, could be reached on the road which faced her, that to the right ran past Harwood into Parkhurst, and that to the left was a lane little used. The last was least familiar to her, and perhaps for this reason she chose it. Presently she regretted her choice. The ground was stony, loose, and worn at the sides into deep ruts that told that the lane had not always been disused. Where trees overhung it, Gertrude had to stoop to escape projecting branches, and the mare ploughed her way through a thick carpet of dead leaves. It was when she had stumbled on the bad road that her rider thought of turning. But she did not turn. "The lane is long," Gertrude said to herself, smiling at an association of ideas, "and leads—leads where?"

A minute later she remembered. It led up to an old burying-ground on the hill above Fenton, and the ruts were the impress of the wheels of numberless hearses. What a grewsome thought! The black trappings of

death in dismal procession had passed between these struggling hedges. Here, perhaps, the driver had had to remove the hat with the streaming weepers, and to stoop, as Gertrude had to stoop, to pass beneath this arm of oak. The mare stumbled again. How the coffin must have been jolted on the stony road, and how, its resting-place attained, the empty vehicle must have rattled back to the place whence it came!

The lane began to climb the hill. In the hedges was a late and rich harvest of blackberries, and long thorny brambles trailed on to the road. A rabbit, of which Gertrude caught only the glimpse of its white tuft of tail, scampered into an adjoining meadow; then another and another and another. Banks rose now on each side, and they were full of holes. A few steps farther on Gertrude found herself in what was almost a warren. Rabbits were to be seen by the dozen. She took her bearings, and concluded that she was on the Fenton estate.

A sudden turn in the road brought the church-yard into view. Gertrude rode up to the crumbling wall and looked over among the graves. How still it was! Something fell—a bit of cement from a leaning cross. The tombstones were moss-grown. Time was eating out the inscriptions. In the silence Gertrude almost fancied she could hear him at his grizzly work. An insect in some breaking mortar ticked like the death spider of a ghost story. Gertrude thought that she had read somewhere of the noiseless feast of worms. In this dismal stillness she said to herself that it would have let itself be heard. A blight seemed on this acre of God. Suddenly a robin sang shrilly from a broken

column. Its singing woke no echo. A grave here was choked with weeds running riot; there the grass grew long upon a mound. Beside it a heavy slab of granite suggested to Gertrude difficulties in the resurrection. Yews deepened the sense of gloom that pervaded the place.

A grayness was creeping over the day. The sun was hidden in a bank of cloud, and a mist hung now like a shroud over the valley. The dampness struck a chill into Gertrude's young bones, and she shivered. That she might better see the church she rode a few yards farther. Decay — as the vulture the carcase — had claimed the building for its own. It was tumbling into ruins, and ivy entered at the glassless windows. Fallen masonry lay at the foot of the walls. The vane upon the tower hung aslant. The roof was the open sky. Even as Gertrude watched a stone loosened by wind and weather fell from its rotten hold. The mare started. There was a little crash, and—silence. Then a muffled sound broke the stillness.

Gertrude was about to move away. She drew rein and listened. The sound seemed to come from the tombs. It ceased and was renewed — a dull, subdued knocking. She rode back to her place by the wall. Her mare was restless and pawed the ground; she threw back her ears. Gertrude pacified her with a soothing hand, and the animal consented to stand still. The sound was heard again — knock, knock, knock. Gertrude shivered. The gloom and the dismal surroundings got a grip of her. She began to think of restless souls, of the sleepless dead, of persons buried by mistake.

The ground was full and disused. Not a grave had been dug for years. The least grewsome, then, of her hypotheses was impossible. She was alarmed. It was her habit when she only intended, as she expressed it, to potter about the place, not to take her groom. She was alone now, and several miles from home. True, there was a nearer way to Eastwood than that by which she had come. About a hundred yards farther up the lane gave on to a road leading to her home in one direction, and to Lesborough, the station for Fenton and the neighborhood, in the other. She was afraid to remain and loath to go. As she deliberated, with the knocking she heard a cry—muffled, buried, but a cry. She looked round once more. The sound, despite her shapeless fancies, must have some human origin. The mist was slowly creeping up the valley. Not a living being was in sight. It was plain that whatever answer was given to the sounds from the tomb must come from herself. She resigned herself to the inevitable and dismounted. How should she hold the mare? She looked about for a gate or a post. There was neither. She led her as far as the road of which I have spoken before she found what she sought in the shape of a friendly sign-post. To this she tethered the animal. She looked up and down the road. There was no one to be seen. Then, catching up her habit, she retraced her steps and entered the garden of the dead.

The spot was choked with graves. Creepers and ivies linked tomb to tomb. Weeds and plants grown wild through neglect had sown themselves in a profusion of disorder. Here the writing on a stone was hidden by a trailing rose. Close by, a wooden cross, black and

worm-eaten, slanted over the resting-place it stood to mark. A few elaborate headstones showed graves of the richer sort; but for the most part the simplicity of the designs told of obscurity. Quaint epitaphs and doggerel rhymes related the virtues of the dead and the grief of the mourners. Gertrude picked her way among the tangled bines, and on the grass-grown paths, at the borders of which, in some places, box had grown in uneven heights. Guided by the sounds, she went round to the other side of the church. At every step she half-expected to be met by a phantom procession. Her heated imagination almost conjured a ghastly vision out of thin air.

The sounds seemed now to come from the ground at her feet. She looked about her, seeking whence it might be possible that they could proceed.

The mist stole nearer and nearer. The chilliness increased. The robin had ceased his song, and a dull silence brooded over the spot.

At the base of the west wall of the church Gertrude came suddenly upon a flight of steps leading down, it seemed, into the ground. The stone was green with damp and age. Small ferns grew in the wet crevices. A massive door at the foot of the steps led possibly to a crypt. Gertrude shuddered when she found that it was thence the sounds proceeded. She thought of vampires and ghouls, of Aminé, who ate grains of rice with a bodkin, and feasted at dead of night on the flesh of corpses. Shuddering again, Gertrude drew the skirt of her habit more closely round her, and descended the slippery stairs. The door was of oak, and heavily studded with nails. A rusty key stood in the lock.

And as she stood before the door trembling, she thought—with no sequence of idea, except in so far as horror suggests horror—of the man with the white eyes who had looked at his wife till she died. She plucked up courage and knocked. The answer was a hoarse scream and a battering at the panels from within.

Gertrude took the key, and with both hands and the exercise of some strength, she turned it. The door grated on its hinges and swung back. As she peered into the dense blackness, expecting she knew not what, her nostrils were assailed by a close, damp smell, and out of the gloom emerged a boy.

It was Tommy Peck.

CHAPTER XXX.

Gertrude had forgotten the lost boy.

"Oh, Tommy," she said, "they are in such a state about you at home! How did you get here? My poor boy, how awful you look?"

The last remark was not made without reason. The child was pale with fright, and almost beside himself with horror and exhaustion. The light seemed to blind him. There were channels of tears on his grimy face. He spoke in a hoarse voice, that was broken by ungovernable sobs. His knuckles were sore and bleeding from constant knocking at the door of his prison, and he had worn holes in the knees of his trousers, through which his flesh could be seen, discolored by the green of the damp step.

He looked over his shoulder continually with wild and distended eyes into the crypt whence Gertrude had released him. She was looking at him in amazement, only by degrees gauging his plight. She gathered disjointed snatches from his talk.

"Bones and skulls and coffins . . . hours and hours . . . yesterday . . . only a rabbit—"

He was gasping with his long sobs.

"Have you been there all night?" said Gertrude.

She waited till he should recover himself sufficiently to speak coherently. It seemed as if this would be a long process. He sank down on a tombstone, and his body was convulsed with the force of the storm of his tears. Gertrude laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Don't cry, Tommy," she said, gently; "don't cry, dear. Tell me all about it. Who shut you in? I can't hear if you speak so fast. Wait a few minutes, and try not to cry. No one shall touch you now."

To give him time, she went down the steps, holding up her habit from the damp green. She looked into the crypt. It was a ghastly prison. She kicked something at her foot, and, stooping, her hand rested on a thing that was hard and round. She brought it to the light, and found that she held a grinning skull. She threw it back with an exclamation of disgust, and heard it rattle on the stone floor. She returned to the boy. He was sobbing less violently.

"Now tell me," she said. She sat down beside him, and took one of his hands. It was a dirty hand, but at this moment Gertrude's instincts were too kind to mind small inconveniences.

"Who shut you in there?" she asked. Her face, though

she did not know it, wore a curious expression. She had no desire to be unjust. She expected to hear a name, and she waited for confirmation of her suspicions, or the contrary.

The boy was diffuse.

He wasn't doing much harm. It was only a rabbit, and there were scores of 'em—'undreds and 'undreds. What harm was there in catching one? And oh, the time he had been shut up—the hours and hours—and he had 'ollared and 'ollared, and look at his hands! That was through thumping at the door. What was the harm of taking a rabbit? It was only a little un, and he was half starved—and oh, the cold—

"Who shut you in there?" said Gertrude again. There was the least shade of impatience in her tone. It was to herself that she was speaking when she added, "There is no need for excuses, it does not matter what it was for—the punishment was out of all proportion to the crime."

The boy began to cry again. In truth, he was sick and faint from long abstinence. He checked Gertrude's sympathy somewhat by continuing to whine his innocence.

"Who shut you in?" she said again.

A gentleman. The boy didn't know his name. Mother knew it. He couldn't remember. But mother knew, and they'd summons him. They'd have the law of him.

What was he like?

The boy couldn't say, but he had seen him in the shop and in the village. He drove through sometimes.

Gertrude looked at her watch. It was half-past three.

"How long have you been there?" she asked.

"I don't know," he replied. "It was about five o'clock yesterday. I come up 'ere after tea—"

"And you have been here ever since!" Gertrude was horrified, and contrite for her lapse of sympathy. "And you have had nothing to eat! Oh, you poor boy! Can you walk? We must get you home. Stop. You shall ride, and I'll walk."

She rose to her feet as she spoke. A sight of the crypt and of the skull, which had rolled once more to the door, suggested to her again the enormity of the boy's punishment.

"Do you mean to tell me that he locked you up yesterday, and that he has never been here since?"

A footfall sounded near, and Gertrude remembered her mare.

"I must go," she said, hurriedly. "There may be tramps about. Come."

Her answer was a cry from the boy. She looked up and saw George Brabant. For a moment no movement was made on the part of any one of the three. Brabant had stopped suddenly in his course as he took in the situation. Then, ignoring him, she told the boy to follow her.

"Miss Maxwell!"

Brabant stood in her path.

"I have nothing to say to you," said Gertrude.

She tried to pass him, but he blocked her way. She looked at him then—full in the face—and met his restless eyes. Something that was appealing in their expression suggested the possibility of an extenuating circumstance. There could be none, she said to herself, in a case of such flagrant cruelty. As he met her scorn,

whatever there was of pleading in his expression vanished. He stood aside, and Gertrude went by in silence.

A cry from the boy made her turn. Brabant held him by the arm.

"Let him go," said Gertrude.

"Then listen to me."

"I shall not, I don't want to hear anything. There is nothing that you could say that could mitigate your offence. Let the boy go. You are hurting him. Let him go, I tell you."

The boy began to whine.

"My arm, my arm! He's breaking my arm. Let me go!"

Brabant laughed and gave the child a jerk, which brought from him a ready scream of pain. A certain irritation at the boy's whimpering served only to add fuel to the flame of Gertrude's wrath. She could have shaken Tommy Peck herself for his miserable whining. She did not think, in truth, that Brabant was at this moment hurting him, but the result of her mixed feelings was a consuming anger towards the man who was the chief link in the chain of circumstances binding the present situation.

"Let him go," she said, breathlessly.

She was very pale, and her lip was quivering with suppressed excitement. The riding-whip which she unconsciously held was shaking. He was looking at it. She saw that he was looking at it, and he laughed oddly. She saw the trembling of the whip, and remembered a case similar to the present, but inverted. It would have relieved her to lay a smarting cut across his insolent face.

The mist had crept up to the wall of the graveyard. The valley was hidden. A sudden sense of isolation struck Gertrude.

"Let the boy go," she said, through thinning lips.

"Will you hear me?"

"No."

It was a conflict of wills.

Again, with contrition, Gertrude remembered the boy's dire plight. She thought of the terrors of his prison. He must be faint with hunger. What wonder that he presented so miserable a spectacle of whining fear?

"Haven't you been cruel enough?" she said, in as quiet a voice as she could command. "Remember what you have done. He has been in that awful place for nearly twenty-four hours. He must be half dead with hunger and exhaustion. Have some pity on him."

"Will you hear me?"

"No."

"Then the boy remains hungry."

"You coward!" said Gertrude. She was paler than before.

"As you like."

There was a pause.

"He is starving," said Brabant. He looked down at young Peck. "It is unkind of the lady not to let you go, isn't it? You have had a dreadful time, haven't you? It is unkind of her to prolong it. Don't you think it is? They are probably terrified about you at home. They think you are dead, most likely. I dare say they are hunting for you high and low. Your mother is probably in the most terrible suspense; but

what is all that in comparison with lowering one's pride? It is a fine thing, pride. I dare say you are aching all over from the damp of the crypt. I see there is a skull down there. You had that as a plaything all night and all day. What a time you must have had! Did you find any bones to set up for ninepins? Ah, that must have been fun! But after it all you are a little tired, perhaps, and you would like to go home!"

"Let me go!" cried the boy; "let me go!"

He began to struggle, and he kicked his tormentor's legs.

"Stop that!" said Brabant, sternly, and he jerked again the arm he held. "It is no good fighting, you know, and your going does not rest with me. You would not think, to look at Miss Maxwell, that she could be so cruel, would you?"

The child whimpered, and covered his face with his sleeve.

The mist entered the church-yard. Gertrude thought of her mare. The afternoon was closing in. It would soon be dark.

"Don't exasperate me," Gertrude said, in a low voice. She was breathing very deeply. He saw the rise and fall of her bosom.

"What happens when you are exasperated?"

He was smiling. His light and restless eyes wandered about her person.

"Let him go!" she said again.

"That is for you to do," he answered.

"Let him go!" said Gertrude.

"Let him go!" said Brabant.

It was then that Gertrude could no longer control

herself. She sprang forward and cut him across the face with her whip. A mark like a narrow white ribbon came out upon his flesh. It extended from his left eye, which miraculously escaped being struck and blinded, over his nose, and onto his right cheek. In the first momentary agony of the smart he loosened his hold on the arm he held, and the boy darted away. With a sickening sense of shame Gertrude realized what she had done.

Tommy Peck stood for a second at the wall of the church-yard and looked back. Then he ran off in the direction of the village, and Gertrude knew that she was alone with Brabant.

"My God, you hurt me!" he said.

The pain for the moment must have been maddening. He caught her wrists and pinioned them.

"You shall hear me now," he said; "you shall hear me whether you like it or not. You've made a devil of me, but you shall hear what I have to say."

There was a struggle. Gertrude tried to wrench away her hands, but he held them tightly. With her knee she pushed against him, trying in vain to free herself. She was frightened now. They staggered together a few steps along the path. Gertrude tripped on the skirt of her habit and both fell onto a sloping bank—he above and she below.

She tried to regain her feet. His weight and his strength prevented her. He rose to a kneeling position, still holding her down. His eyes were no longer restless. Their look was concentrated on her own. She made a desperate resistance.

"It is no good," he said; "you shall not move till you

have heard what I have to say. You've made a devil of me. You would not hear by fair means, and you shall by foul."

She saw that it was useless to struggle. She called "Tommy!" loudly.

"The young of his class are not distinguished for their valor or their gallantry," said Brabant; "he has made off as fast as his legs can carry him."

Gertrude, powerless to move, and realizing that she was at the mercy of a madman, began to calculate distances. Even supposing the boy sent help, it could not arrive for at least an hour. She thought of the mare.

"This is horrible," she said, in a choking voice. "Let me get up."

"Keep still," he said; "you shall hear me."

"Let me get up," said Gertrude, "and I will listen to you. I promise I will listen."

"No," said Brabant, "you shall stay as you are. I will not move an inch till I have told you what I have to say."

Gertrude groaned.

"You are a coward," she said, brokenly.

"Am I?" he said. "Well, perhaps I am; I don't know. You judge me by ordinary standards, and you forget that my case is exceptional. I am now, as it were, outside the law. I am taking what you will not give. I can't expect you to understand me. You took the worst view of my conduct just now in connection with that boy. You let the bare facts speak their hardest against me. You were ready to think evil of me. Well, the facts were bad enough, but they were not quite so black at you were prepared—as you wished—

to think. It is perfectly true that I shut the lad into that place. The keepers have been complaining of poachers, and I caught the boy myself setting a snare. I am not a very equable sort of person, as you know. I was angry—angrier, perhaps, than I need have been, and I thought to give him a lesson that he would not be in a hurry to forget. I locked him into the crypt, meaning to leave him there for an hour or two at the most. Well, you know what happens when man proposes. I should think in disposing such a line of obstacles had not often been laid out to frustrate a fellow's intentions. I am living at Fenton alone this year. I have had no parties for the shooting, and I am keeping up a small establishment of servants. When I got to the house I was met by two of the women screaming. Dalton, my man, was dead drunk, and he was rushing about the house with a chopper. He has been a heavy drinker for some time, and I had threatened to send him off more than once, but I let him stay on because he had been with me so long. There happened to be no other man in the house, except one of the grooms, who is a poor little chap, and not good for much outside his own work. Everything had gone wrong. I had sent my coachman and another groom up to town on some business connected with the new stables I am building. I dismissed Winton, my butler, last week. The gardeners do not live on the place. I had a pleasant time of it, I can tell you. The women were hysterical. I was up all night with Dalton. He had delirium tremens, and when I had sent the groom for the doctor there was no one to stay with him but myself. It was morning before the doctor arrived. He had been away

from home, and the messenger rode backward and forward over the country for him."

He paused for a few moments. The mist was in the church-yard now. Brabant's eyes still held Gertrude's. The mark of the whip disfigured him. It was swollen now, and seemed to divide his face.

"After that," he continued, "I fell asleep. It was a hideous trick which my ill-luck played me. I slept till half an hour ago, when I woke and remembered. I rushed up here to let the boy go. The rest you know."

Gertrude had heard in silence. When he had finished speaking she made another effort to rise. His weight hurt her. His face was close above hers. He tightened his hold of her hands, which he held against her breast. He could feel the tumultuous beating of her heart. His face terrified her. The mark of the cut was slowly changing color. It became from deadliest white an angry red.

"Let me get up!" she said again, desperately.

He made no answer.

Her eyes filled with tears. He bent his head and kissed them. She saw the wet on his moustache.

"Keep still," he said; "I can feel your heart beating. How it beats. It knocks my hands—it is I who have made it beat—that is something. How I love you—how I love you! Do you know what beautiful eyes you have? I can see deep, deep down into them through your tears. Your hat is falling off; that is so that I may see your hair. Oh, your dear hair! I have longed to kiss it as I am going to kiss it now. How crisp it is! I knew how it would feel against my mouth. How white and smooth your forehead is. Your ears are

beautiful. I should like to kiss them, but I cannot without moving, and then you might get free. Oh, your lips—your lips!"

He caressed them lightly with his own. Gertrude groaned again. With a sense of horror she felt herself growing weak.

"I appeal to you as a man to let me go," she said, desperately.

"No," he whispered; "I shall not let you go yet."

"I am a girl," she said, "I am not as strong as you. I am hideously ashamed of having struck you. I shall remember it all my life. I am sorry—oh! sorry—and ashamed. Let me go. I will think kindly of you always."

"It is too late," he said, in a whisper. "After this you will never think kindly of me again. It would be impossible. I am behaving like a devil and—a cad. But I cannot help it. This is the end, you know, the end of everything for me—"

He broke off. She wondered, vaguely, what he meant.

"And as to thinking kindly," he continued, after a pause, "what is that? You would withhold yourself. You would belong to some one else; and at this moment, as far as physical strength can avail anything, you belong to me. You are mine absolutely, so that—"

He lowered his voice to a whisper, and she did not catch the words that followed. She only knew that her fears were doubled.

There was silence in the church-yard. Gertrude saw the mist gathering itself to a visible deepness on the nap of Brabant's coat, and hanging like a white shroud round the graves. The dismal afternoon insisted on thoughts of death.

A sound broke the stillness. It was the distant roll of wheels—so distant at first that probably only the intense alertness of Gertrude's senses enabled her to hear it. With the seconds it came nearer. She held her breath. Brabant was speaking again.

"Why couldn't you listen before?" he said, in a low voice; "then you would not have driven me to an exercise of brute force. Well, I said you should hear me, and you have heard me. Now I wonder what I have gained; your everlasting hatred I suppose? I have done for myself forever, but—you don't know what I have gone through. Gertrude, I have been driven to this. Oh, my God! if I could make you understand! Why couldn't you care for me? You could have changed me—"

Gertrude did not answer. She was counting the moments and listening to the approaching sound. Brabant did not appear to hear it. Her fear was that when he did he would place his hand over her mouth.

Suddenly Brabant put a question to her.

"Could you ever forgive my conduct of to-day?" he said.

Gertrude shook her head.

"Think what you are saying," he said, in a curiously intense voice. "Could you ever forgive me? I admit everything. I have behaved like the veriest cad on God's earth. I deserve no pity. I am not worthy to touch your hand again, or to darken respectable doors. But, think before you answer—could you ever forgive me?"

Gertrude shook her head again. "I could never forgive you," she said, trembling.

The moment had come. She could hear the wheels and the sound of hoofs close at hand on the Lesborough road. She gathered her forces for a desperate struggle.

To her surprise she found herself free. The market cart from Lesborough was allowed to pass, and furthermore Gertrude found Brabant helping her into her saddle.

"Good-bye," he said, still in the same serious tone.

She made no answer.

"You meant what you said—you can never forgive me?"

"I can never forgive you."

CHAPTER XXXI.

Gertrude appeared at dinner as usual that evening. The news of the loss and the finding of Tommy Peck was by that time public property. Gertrude gave her version of the finding of him with reservations.

"Mrs. Peck is furious," said Lady Julia. "I am not surprised."

Graham, who had arrived during the afternoon at Eastwood, and was a keen sportsman, said something about poaching from his own point of view.

"Still, I suppose nothing would justify so summary and cruel a punishment," he added.

"Mr. Brabant meant to let the boy go," said Gertrude; "it was a chapter of accidents which resulted in the imprisonment all night. What could have been more unforeseen than all that happened at Fenton?"

Graham had not heard this part of the story. Ger-

trude was sitting next to him, and she gave him a short summary of that which she had refused herself to hear.

"That alters the case a bit," said Graham. He was looking at Gertrude, and noting her extreme pallor.

"It seems to me to mitigate the offence," she answered.

"Nothing could mitigate the offence," said Lady Julia. "It was an unpardonable piece of cruelty."

"As matters were ordained," said Gertrude, hotly, "Mr. Brabant did not intend—"

"You take his part!" said Lady St. Pancras.

"I only wish to be just," said Gertrude.

There was a chorus of condemnation. A general argument followed. Graham, looking at the beautiful girl beside him, listened in silent admiration of her, and Gertrude, to her lasting thankfulness in the light of subsequent events, carried the remembrance, and will carry it to the day of her death, that, despite all that had taken place between them, she had on this memorable evening espoused the cause of the unhappy wretch from whom she had parted a few hours back, and at whose hands she had suffered such indignities in the misty graveyard.

The talk rolled off to other matters. Graham had seen a play during his absence. He spoke of it.

"I went because I had to be in town, and I did not know how to fill my time."

He saw that she was listening with an effort. Her eyes wandered round the room, and were attracted again and again to the picture which resembled Brabant. With her memory of his face as she had seen it that afternoon, the likeness was more than ever striking.

"I can't get it out of my head," she said. She seemed to be speaking to herself. She realized suddenly that she had spoken aloud. Graham saw her look again hurriedly at the picture, and he drew his own conclusions. He said nothing at the time, and Gertrude asked him to tell her about the play. He was wondering what had happened during his absence. He had heard, of course, of the Beckenham affair. Lady St. Pancras had made it her pleasurable duty to inform him of the little scandal.

"Julia took it wonderfully," she told him; "arranged the reconciliation, gave Kate good advice, and sent her home with her husband. And now the less said about the whole thing the better. Of course, people will talk, and you know one can't help remembering that it must all reflect upon Julia herself, who made up the match, and must have known as well as possible at the time. Everybody did know. Beckenham's life has been a pretty open book. I hear the goings on at Lesham before he married were—something! However, it is all satisfactorily settled, and the Divorce Court avoided—and all's well that ends well, isn't it?"

"I don't know," said Graham, with his frank smile.

In answer to Gertrude, he said the piece he had seen was well acted, but disappointing. He spoke of the plot. It was in some sort analogous to that of "Auld Robin Gray."

"But Robin Gray was young in this case, and the girl thought that she cared for him—and she would have cared for him if the lover had not come back."

"And the end?" said Gertrude; "the end?"

"That was left to us to work out for ourselves. The

curtain fell on the return of the lover—rich, in a position to marry. You see, the play was very modern. It was as unsatisfying as Ibsen."

Dinner came to an end. Lady Julia proposed a gamble. She had written for a roulette, and it had that morning arrived. She asked Lord St. Pancras not to stop long in the dining-room. Henry must come and arrange the table, and count his money for the bank, which he was to keep with his aunt.

Lord St. Pancras, who liked to linger over his port, grumbled good-temperedly when a message from Lady Julia informed him that all was ready and the ladies waited in the smoking-room. The men filed across the hall and flocked round the table. Lady Julia, with a certain business-like air, and her money counted into little piles in front of her, sat impatiently waiting to begin. Henry, with half an inch of a blunt pencil and the back of an envelope, was, as she expressed it, fogging out his accounts.

"I should have done it in half the time myself," she said; "but then I should have taken the trouble to get a proper pencil, and I should not have used the back of an envelope."

"Don't talk, Aunt Julia," said Henry; "you interrupt me."

"Look at his pencil!" said Lady Julia. "Did you ever see such a stump? For goodness' sake lend him one—one of you. That thing is getting on my nerves."

Henry refused several proffered loans. He brought his calculations to a satisfactory issue.

Gertrude, by way of a preliminary canter, spun the cylinder. The ball, with a pleasant rattle, danced in and

out of the holes. At hazard, Gertrude touched with her hand Rouge, Impair, and the second six numbers. Nine, red, turned up. Graham was watching her.

"I wish we had been playing," she said; "I should have won on all three."

"Follow your luck," he said, smiling.

Again Gertrude sent the noisy ball on its wanton course among the revolving holes.

"I shall try a single number for thirty-five times my imaginary stakes—nine."

Nine it was.

"Let us begin," said Gertrude, with sparkling eyes. As she spoke, she proferred a sovereign to the bank for change. Lady Julia pushed over to her one of the piles of silver which in methodical array lay before her.

The game began. In a short time Gertrude had some gold among her silver. She was elated. She forgot Brabant and the misty graveyard. Graham watched her play. She won repeatedly. He took up his position behind her chair. When he stooped to place his stakes on the table he touched her shoulder.

At ten o'clock Harwood came in. He had been dining at the Vicarage, and had made an early escape. He looked round the table. His eyes paused in their survey at Gertrude's little heap of coins. The number that Lady Julia announced in her metallic voice added to the girl's pile, and also to the money which Graham was winning. He was following Gertrude's fortunes. Each time that she won she looked up and exchanged a smile with him.

"You are getting on well, Miss Maxwell," said Harwood.

"So far," said Gertrude. She waited till the bank had scooped up its winnings and paid its debts, and then she laid her fresh stakes on the table.

"I have no luck of my own to speak of," said Harwood, "so I must borrow some one else's. I am going to trust myself to yours."

He staked as she had staked, and Graham also.

"As you like," said Gertrude, "but be careful. The luck may change. Be careful!"

The ball rattled, and was silent.

"Twenty-one, red," said Lady Julia.

Gertrude and her followers scored again. Lady St. Pancras, who was playing with pennies, looked up plaintively.

"There!" she said, hopelessly. "I have kept to *passe* and red nearly every time till this, and just because I thought I would try *manque* and black, the opposites turn up. The time before that I tried the second dozen, and the number was in the first. It is very disheartening."

"How much have you lost?" asked her husband—"fourpence?"

"One and tenpence," said Lady St. Pancras, after the calculation involved by taking the twopence which she held from the two shillings with which she had started.

"You are too impetuous, Aunt Betty," said Graham. "I hold my breath when I see you play so incautiously."

"It gives me a cold shiver down my spine to see you so reckless," said Henry, gravely.

Lady St. Pancras staked her two remaining coins, and lost them.

"It is a dreadful gambling game," she said; "and I am not sure that it isn't very wrong."

She looked at Gertrude, who was gathering in fresh gains.

"You'll lose," she said, cheerfully; "I won once myself. Mark my words, dear, you'll lose it all presently."

Gertrude laughed. She had a heightened color now, and her eyes were very bright. Graham remembered her pallor at dinner. Lady Julia, in one of the intervals between her duties as joint banker with her nephew, looked round the table. She sighed impatiently as she noted her niece's beauty. She had a shrewd suspicion that it was not Graham who was dilatory. He was looking down at the girl's soft hair. The light of the candles caught here and there a single thread, and showed how fine was its texture. For a whim, she had to-night brushed back the locks on her forehead, and had parted her shining hair, and it was twisted loosely at the back of her head. She was beautiful enough to to be, when she wished it, unfettered by the trammels of fashion. Graham found himself marvelling at the delicate whiteness of that straight parting. Her dress was, as usual, very simple, and very perfect of its kind. To a girl of less notable charm its plainness would have been trying.

The ball rattled, and lay still in a hole. Gertrude watched the slackening revolution of the cylinder.

"I believe I am going to lose this time," she said to Graham.

"Twenty-six—black," said Henry Maxwell, and Gertrude and Graham and Harwood saw their stakes swept up by the bank.

"Take care!" said Gertrude, my luck is going to leave me."

She doubled her stakes and lost.

She looked at the two men who were playing as she played.

"Leave me in time," she said, in a curiously earnest voice. "Leave me in time. My luck has gone. I shall not bring you any good."

Harwood said he would try a system of his own; but Graham said nothing, and Gertrude saw that he continued to follow her lead.

It was true that the luck had changed. Gertrude saw her pile dwindle. Lady St. Pancras looked on with interest. Graham stooped over Gertrude to place his money beside hers on the table.

"Be warned," she said, in a low voice; "be warned in time."

He only smiled, and with careful aim threw down his coins as he had intended. Gertrude saw that they were the last of the money which he had taken out to play with.

"And if you lose it you are ruined," she said, half laughing.

"I am ruined," he said, with a smile.

The bank swept up his stakes. He took a note from his pocket-book. A clock struck twelve. Lady St. Pancras was yawning. Her husband had ceased to play and was lighting a cigar.

"This must be the last turn," said Lady Julia.

There was a cry for the usual warning of three before the last, but Lady Julia was firm.

Gertrude had reduced her hoard to a single coin.

"At least, I have lost, too, she said to herself.

The ball rattled noisily, jumping from side to side of its revolving prison like a bird in a small cage. A sudden inspiration came to Gertrude, and she laid her coin on Zero. She looked up for Graham and saw that he was changing a note. When he returned to his place the ball was silent, and the game was made.

"Why weren't you in time?" she said. "I have an idea that I am going to win back what I have lost—yes, with thirty-six chances against me."

Henry raised his head to the numbers.

"Zero," he said.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Lady St. Pancras rose with alacrity. She had lost two shillings and her beauty-sleep. Her husband had drawn his chair over to the fire and was smoking complacently. Lady Julia and Henry were settling up the affairs of the bank with some satisfaction and a considerable amount of argument.

Gertrude, watching her aunt keenly counting up her winnings, thought of the poor little wife at Lesham. Lady Beckenham's troubles seemed to have left small impression upon the mistress of Eastwood. She had averted scandal, and could think of other things. Harwood came from a group that was standing round a table whence proceeded the sound of the clink of glass and the splashing of soda-water.

"Your system?" said Gertrude.

"I finished as I began," he answered. "In the long-run I neither won nor lost."

"Things go smoothly for you," said Gertrude; "no gains, no losses—that is the best fortune, after all."

It struck Harwood that she was not speaking altogether of the game. If she had any further intention, however, he did not grasp it. Graham came up.

"Why did you not follow Mr. Harwood's example?" Gertrude asked him. "He left me in time. I told you I should bring you no good. I lost you everything, you see, and then in the end—I won myself."

"You could not help that," said Graham, smiling.

"No, I could not help that," said Gertrude; "and I told you I should bring you no good."

Harwood put down his glass and said that he must be going. Gertrude and Graham and one or two others who were lingering, loath to go to bed, followed him into the hall. Some one opened the front door. The mist was gone. Moonlight bathed the steps and the gravel. Henry, who had finished his banking and was mischievous, seized a shawl from a peg, and, surprising his sister, threw it over her head, pushed her out on to the drive, and shut the door. Gertrude waited complacently till he chose to open it, and greeted him with a handful of damp grass from a small heap which by the carelessness of the gardener, who thought of nothing but orchids, stood at the edge of a recently-mown border. A little scuffle ensued. The others joined in the affray. Cushions and rugs flew about the hall.

Lady Julia remonstrated with Henry, who seemed to be ringleader, but a timely down-pillow from one of

the lounges, thrown by her nephew with precise aim, checked her expostulation, and having seen that there was nothing likely to be broken, and that among such of her guests as were playing at being children, there was at least one married woman to relieve her of any duties of chaperonage, she threw the cushion back at Henry and went up to bed.

Lady St. Pancras, thinking over her lost two shillings as she prepared for her couch, wondered what all the noise was about.

"I think they must be romping in the hall," said her maid, in possible explanation.

Quite suddenly the sounds ceased, and there followed, after a short interval, the banging of a door.

Lady St. Pancras and her maid went to the window.

"Why, if they aren't all going out for a walk!" said the young woman.

"Is Mr. Graham with them?"

"Yes, my lady."

"And Miss Maxwell?"

"They're walking together. How the ladies 'll mess their shoes!"

But the ladies had had forethought, and they had run up to their rooms and put on boots when Henry suggested that in a mass they should see Harwood on his way. No one was sleepy; the night after the dull and foggy day was light and fine; the proposal had been hailed with enthusiasm. How the moon lit up the late autumn night! Gertrude thought of other moons she had known, and they brought their attendant memories. Again she thought of France without pain, and—she was deceived.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" asked Graham, after a silence.

It was not the moonlight, as he at first supposed, that made Gertrude's face appear so deadly pale. All the excitement that had during the game of chance lent to it so brilliant an animation seemed to have left her, and in its place a heavy weight of anxiety weighed upon her spirit.

"I think I have a great deal to say to you," she answered, presently, "and I don't know how to say it. How long have you been away? It seems a long, long time."

"Two days," he said, smiling.

"It seems much longer. These two days have been crammed with incident. Well—I missed you. I missed you more than I should have thought possible. It was a sort of shock to me to see your place empty that night, and to hear that you had gone away. I felt lonely, and—I thought of you a great deal—"

There was another silence. Graham did not break it. He waited for her to continue.

"You know about Lady Beckenham?" she said.

"I have been told something of what took place."

"She was made to marry her husband," said Gertrude; "Aunt Julia made her. I dare say you know a good deal about him. I want you to put all that aside. Suppose him a model husband. Do you know that even then neither of them would be happy?"

"Because?"

"Because—oh, I know I can trust you, and in telling you I am not betraying her confidence — because she cared for some one else before she married, and she cares for him still."

There was a long pause. It was filled by the voices of the noisy party in front.

"Why did you tell me of that play?" Gertrude said, suddenly. "The play that suggested 'Robin Gray.' Why did you tell me? I wish you had not. It was like a second warning. Oh, I wish you had not!"

"Will you tell me something?" said Graham, gently. "Is it Brabant that you care for?"

"Mr. Brabant?—that I care for? Oh no, no, no! A thousand times, no! What made you think that?"

Gertrude shuddered.

"Something you said at dinner—"

"Oh no," said Gertrude; "no. I only wanted to be just. If you knew— I have brought him ill enough. I could not hear him condemned unfairly."

The tears started to her eyes. She had put the events of the day from her; the rattle of the roulette ball had drowned the words she had heard; the interest of watching the numbers had shut out the memory of the wretched face with its angry seam of red. Ah, that seam! The cut on her wrist was avenged, but at what a cost!

"It is the other way," she said, miserably, "and I have brought him nothing but evil."

The tears were rolling down Gertrude's cheeks. She turned her head to hide them, but Graham put his hands gently on her shoulders and forced her to face him.

"Gertrude," he said, "what do you wish of me? Shall I go away? I will do as you tell me."

"I don't know what to tell you," said Gertrude, blankly. "I don't know what to tell you. As God hears

me, I want to do what is right, but I don't know myself. Listen to me. At first when *he* went—you know who I mean—no, you don't know, but you understand—I could not think of him without being miserable. I could not go to any place where I had seen him without pain. I could not look at—at anything that was his without a sort of despair. Well—he didn't care for me, though sometimes I thought he did; and he has been gone some months. I haven't forgotten him. I never shall forget him; but I am not unhappy for him as I was—"

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. In America, perhaps. He had a ranch."

Gertrude smiled through her tears.

"Do you know there was a time when that word—I can't describe what I mean—it made my pulses beat."

"Shall I go, Gertrude? The answer must come from you."

"Don't leave it to me," said Gertrude. "Indeed, indeed, I don't know myself. If you go, I shall miss you horribly—horribly. I think I do care for you. I know I care for you. But think of to-night. What sorry luck I brought you! Oh, Wilfrid! I don't know what to say to you! I respect you so much. You are immeasurably my superior, and—yes, I care for you—oh, I like you—"

"Could you love me, Gertrude?"

"I know I could love you. I should have loved you if you had been first. I—I think I love you now."

"Then, shall I stay?" said Graham.

A star shot across the sky.

"If he came back!" said Gertrude, fearfully.

There was a long pause. Then Graham, after a struggle for patience, spoke.

"Gertrude, you must answer me definitely," he said. "Things have gone far enough with me already; but I suppose, for one's peace of mind, they could go further, and if you will not consent to marry me I should like to go away soon. I know from even my short acquaintance with you the strong hold you have over me, but if it is to lead to nothing it must not be strengthened. I was attracted to you at once. I had heard of you for a long time. You can understand," with a smile, "that my aunt has not left this stone unturned. She sang your praises without intermission. I wondered about you, and I formed ideas which fell very short of reality, as I found when I saw you. I fell in love with you, as many others seem to have done, and I offer you the strongest love I have ever felt. You must answer me, Gertrude."

The subdued sound of the voices that broke the stillness of the night showed that an appreciable distance had been measured between those who were in reality accompanying Harwood on his homeward way and the two who stood facing each other.

"Shall I go, or stay?" said Graham.

"You know what you know."

"Will you try to forget him—to give your whole heart to me?"

"I will try."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The recollection of Brabant haunted Gertrude like an ugly dream. In the silence of her own room it was not of her promise to Graham that she thought, but of the horrible events of the afternoon. Despite her natural shame of what she had done, she had not fallen forever in her own estimation. The thing was so recent that the provocation was still plain to her, and the indignities to which his superior strength had forced her to submit put him outside the pale of a regret for her own act. It was true that his graver offence was subsequent to her own, but it was so heinous as to forfeit for him all right to her remorse. Even now she shuddered as she thought of what his brutality had caused her to undergo. She knew that she had done a thing which, in the eyes of the world, it would be difficult to justify. She did not wish to justify it. She was ashamed of it. She would be ashamed of it always; but in her own eyes she herself did not stand disgraced. Every instinct of her womanhood revolted against the blow, but a dispassionate consideration of the facts themselves gave it its proper value in relation to the provocation.

Still a very unpleasant weight hung over her. It was one thing to acquit herself—it was another to escape the consequences of her deed. It would be pretty news to go the round of the county that Miss Maxwell had laid her whip across the face of Mr. Brabant! She did not fear that the story would emanate from him. Even af-

ter what had occurred she gave him credit for sufficient gentlemanly feeling to keep back her name from any scandal that might arise out of the imprisonment of Tommy Peck. It was from the Pecks themselves that Gertrude dreaded a publicity of her shame in the affair; but fortune favored her.

At the post-office, in the course of a long conversation, Gertrude gathered that by some miracle Tommy was evidently unaware of the blow which his tormentor had received at the hands of Miss Maxwell. Gertrude remembered the boy's cowering attitude, and the sight of his sleeve before his eyes. Apparently he only knew about the struggle. Gertrude could have kissed him for his unobservance. But her relief did not end here. Mrs. Peck's threats of the legal vengeance she was going to wreak upon Brabant had ended in air. She had now heard the "facks" of the case. Tommy, she was sorry to say, was not overtruthful, for which she blamed herself, having been too much given to sparing the rod, and he had never said anything about that little affair of the poaching. Mr. Brabant had sent her a letter that morning by special messenger, just before he left Fenton for the Continent, telling her the story from the beginning He had acted "most fair and gentlemanly;" he was very sorry for the anxiety that had been caused to Mrs. Peck, and he explained how his intention of letting the boy out after a wholesome lesson had been frustrated by the unforeseen course of events of which the reader knows. He hoped that the boy would be none the worse for what had happened.

"And there was an 'andsome enclosure," concluded Mrs. Peck; "so the matter's ended amicable."

"I am glad of that," said Gertrude. She did not say how glad.

"And if," said Mrs. Peck, casting a look of solemn warning at her delinquent offspring, "Tommy ever dares to poach again—and he's been brought up different and had every advantage and ought to know better—he shall have his father's strap—or Polly, either," she added, including one of his sisters in her awful glance. "I treat one like another, as well she knows!"

Gertrude was not listening. Something else that Mrs. Peck had said had but at this moment filtered through the feeling of relief that was absorbing her attention.

"Did you say he was going away—Mr. Brabant?"

"Gone, miss; went up to town this morning by the seven-twenty from Lesborough. He's going abroad to Monte something — Monte Cristo, where they 'ave the gambling. He is a strange gentleman, Miss Maxwell. The groom says he never said nothing about going away yesterday, and they heard him up all night, and in the morning he was packed and off. Seemed very odd, too, the groom told me. Ah, there's funny blood there, miss, and nothing would ever surprise me as I heard about *his* grandfather's grandchild. However, that's neither here nor there, and he's behaved very 'andsome to me. What was I saying? Oh yes, he's gone away! I expect he wanted a bit of change after the night he had with his servant as had D. T. The groom told me Mr. Brabant had a dreadful time of it, and got knocked about a bit, too. There's quite a mark on his face this morning."

Gertrude felt herself growing crimson.

"I ask you pardon," said Mrs. Peck; "I oughtn't to have spoken of delirious tremens to you."

She changed the conversation quickly—a matter of little difficulty to one so well versed in the news of the neighborhood.

"Have you heard that Miss Ransom's very ill and not likely to recover?"

Gertrude had not heard.

"It's pleurasy on the top of some sort of a decline," said Mrs. Peck; "and I hear from the house-keeper, who knows it from the nurse, as the doctors say she's so lowered herself with taking drugs as there's no chance of saving her life. They say she must have been in a bad way ever so long. And if you remember, she fainted away in church not so many Sundays back."

Gertrude turned to go. She was shocked by what Mrs. Peck had just told her. Everything connected with Miss Ransom was painful to her. She could not forget the scene in the meadow, when, in listening to the confession of the hysterical passion, she had fancied to her horror that she recognized in it a grotesque and distorted likeness of her own feelings for France. She had since succeeded in arguing away so horrible a fancy. She was sorry now to hear of Miss Ransom's illness. She pitied the unhappy girl from her heart, but, justly or unjustly, she could not shake off the sense of repugnance and shrinking which was caused to her by any reminder of her name or existence.

It was, then, with mingled sensations of relief and regret that Gertrude left the post-office. Nothing could have had a more fortunate ultimate issue than the ominous events of the preceding afternoon. In the allevi-

ation from further anxiety on the score of the possible publicity of what had taken place, Gertrude felt a more real repentance of her hasty act than she had yet experienced. She was grateful to Brabant for having gone away. It was generous of him. She was softened in her judgments, and a pity for his unhappiness ousted her resentment. Something that he had said recurred to her: "You judge me by ordinary standards. You forget that my case is exceptional." Did he speak of the terrible inheritance that was his birthright? If so, what could be more melancholy than the consciousness of his irresponsibility? He was not master of himself. Gertrude knew that. She had seen a dozen times the demon of his insanity looking at her out of his restless eyes. Tears filled her own as the unspeakable sadness of his ill-balanced life was made plain to her. Afterwards, Gertrude accounted it a merciful kindness that had been vouchsafed to her when she remembered that her hatred of him had left her, and that in its place had come a Heaven-sent pity. At the time she only knew that, as she freely forgave him, and in imagination asked his own forgiveness of her, her heart felt lighter, and that the day seemed more bright.

When she reached home, even the latest had finished breakfast—a movable feast at Eastwood, as Henry could have testified. Graham saw Gertrude as she entered the dining-room, and he followed her. A happier look was on her face than he remembered yet to have seen there. She was thoughtful and gentle and less abrupt than usual, and there could be no mistaking the contentment of her expression.

"Gertrude, you don't regret your promise?" he said,

in a low voice. It was his first reference to the events of the night before. While he rang for coffee, and helped her to cold partridge, or cut bread for her, he had been speaking unconcernedly of the plans of the day.

For answer, Gertrude gave him her hand. A long look passed between them.

"God bless you," he said, "and help me to make you happy!"

Soon after this the engagement was made public. It elicited the most hearty congratulations. Lady Julia kissed her niece with a warmth quite foreign to her normal embrace. She said it was a long time since she had been so glad about anything.

Gertrude could not resist the mischief of saying:

"Even the Beckenham marriage pales beside this, doesn't it, Aunt Julia?"

Lady St. Pancras was expansive and tearful. She was overjoyed, she said—truly overjoyed. The wish of her heart was to be accomplished. She pressed both Gertrude and Graham separately—though they might have been pressed simultaneously—to her ample bosom.

Lord St. Pancras wrung his nephew's hand. He was thankful, he said, to have lived to see this day. Graham himself, accepting with his frank smile the felicitations that were showered upon him, was in great spirits; and Gertrude, in the midst of such rejoicings, could not but share the general gladness. As a step towards putting France forever out of her life, she went to the drawer that held his rose, and burned the dried and crackling flower. Somehow, she did not watch the curling petals writhe in the flames without a

pang. The past must be blotted out. She would so school herself that places and things should lose their associations for her. She meant to be happy, and Wilfrid must be happy, too. So the stream on which she had floated her wooden letter was henceforth just a stream; the rose-tree of tender memory was just a rose-tree; the banjo was a noisy instrument, without much music in its soul, and a certain simple little song of no great pretensions should be given to Henry to learn. There could be no quicker or more effectual way of robbing it of any dangerous charm. She stood by the hearth in her room, watching the glowing embers that still retained the likeness of a rose. She sighed, and stirred the fire impatiently. The flower fell to ashes. So closed, she thought, that chapter in her life over which was written the name of France.

The closing of another chapter was the result, to her, of a great shock. From Monte Carlo there reached her the news of Brabant's death. He was found in the gardens of the Casino shot through the head. To Gertrude's lasting horror, she could not persuade herself that the tragic deed was due, as the papers suggested, to his losses at the tables. As if to add a completeness to the tragedy of his story, Miss Ransom's death followed his at an interval of a few days.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Time moved on.

The preparations for Gertrude's wedding were in full swing. Lady Julia and her niece travelled backward and forward between Eastwood and London many times during the winter days. The house was empty of visitors now. Wilfrid Graham came down often.

Gertrude told him the whole story of Brabant. She was, indeed, too much horrified by his death to keep what she knew to herself. From her heart she was thankful that her softer thoughts of him had come to her before he died. She wished that he could have known that she bore him no resentment for his treatment of her in the disused graveyard; that though she had said that she could never forgive him, she had forgiven him, and she wished that he might know that, robbed by death of all that had repelled her, she remembered him only as having unwisely loved. She thought of him often, and, rightly or wrongly, she prayed for his soul.

Graham reminded her how she had defended him once when all were against him.

"It was only because I wanted to be just," she said. "I am thankful for it—but it was not kindness then. I had not at that time made allowances. He was not responsible for himself. Wilfrid, I can hear him now asking me if I could not forgive him, and I told him that I could not. Oh, what would I not give to know that he forgave me!"

Graham saw in the suicide at Monte Carlo a feature which he did not point out to Gertrude.

"He might have done it at home," he said to himself. "Good God, if he had not thought of her, he might have shot himself that night!"

To Gertrude he dwelt on the fact that at Monte Carlo Brabant had staked recklessly and lost heavily. But he himself was not deceived.

December came to an end. The wedding was to be in February. Among Gertrude's letters of congratulations was one from Lady Beckenham.

"Things are not much better here," wrote the poor little wife; "so, Gertrude dear, you must forgive me if I say I hope you have chosen for yourself."

"Yes," Gertrude wrote back; "I have chosen for myself. You must meet Wilfrid before very long. I shall have the best husband in England, Kate; and if I am not happy, the fault will be my own."

"I wonder what she means by that," said Lady Beckenham to herself.

To Gertrude's great relief, Mrs. Woodford was wintering abroad, so the Manor was closed, and Gertrude heard nothing there to disturb her. Happy as she was in her engagement with Graham, she lived in continual dread of anything arising to remind her of the past. She hoped that it was buried, but she knew herself to be human. She was startled one day to realize how remote an association of ideas could unearth it from the tomb to which she had consigned it. Among the deaths she read that of a Mrs. Essex, in Grosvenor Place. What did she know of a Mrs. Essex in Grosvenor Place? Who had said, "Bruff—Broughton Essex, you know,

his name was, and Bruff evolved itself for short?" She remembered at once. The very words I have quoted came, as they had been spoken, from some chamber in her brain, where, with other sacred relics of memory, they had been stored. This must be the mother of the man who died on the ranch—the mother of France's friend. Oh, France—

To atone for the involuntary lapse of her allegiance to Graham, she wrote him a long and affectionate letter, such as he liked to receive from her.

Another month went by. A fortnight more would see her his wife. It was about this time that, one day, Gertrude, looking at two pictures in the dining-room—the first, the portrait of a girl; the second, that of Michael Maxwell—suddenly remembered a conversation which had once taken place concerning them. Gertrude and Lady St. Pancras had between them related a short history, and Graham, leaving facts, had proposed, by a rearrangement of circumstances, an amendment, which would have been more poetically just, and also more complete. The portrait of Michael Maxwell resembled Brabant, as we know. In the situation of the girl, Gertrude saw an analogy to her own, and with a thrill of wonder she realized that her story had worked itself out closely up to a certain point on the lines of Graham's laughing suggestion. What if this point were passed!

Once married to Graham, she told herself, she would be safe, and a very fever of impatience began to consume her—impatience for the day to come which should see the knot tied between them, and make retraction under any circumstances impossible. She had now a

fixed dread of meeting France before her wedding. After that, she thought, if she should see him, though the risk would be greater, so in proportion would her strength be greater. Graham had as much of her heart as she could give him, and at all cost she would make him happy. It was curious how firm a hold this fear got of her. She was uncertain of herself. At times she would look at Graham's photograph and tell herself how fortunate she was to be beloved of him. She was proud of his good looks, of his popularity, of his very inches—of everything, in short, that went to make him what he was. At others, a memory of France would force the knowledge upon her that she could not take back that which she had once given. At such moments she would almost regret her promise, though it had been honestly made, and she would deplore having deceived herself into a belief that she had forgotten, or could ever forget, him.

Lady Julia knew nothing of all this. She only saw in Gertrude a lucky girl who, at this moment, was the envy of most other young women of Graham's acquaintance. She had, indeed, nearly forgotten the Woodford affair, and only thought of it—if indeed she ever thought of it at all—to congratulate herself that she had put a stop to it in time. Gertrude, it was plain, had consoled herself easily; Lady Julia's own arguments, which we remember, had proved themselves sound, and all was going well.

Knutsford had written offering his congratulations. Of young Wakefield, Gertrude had lost sight, and of her other lovers one was married, one was dead, another (if I may include him) had ridden away, and little Har-

wood, completing the definite list of those who had meant matrimony, was bravely to the fore with his felicitations.

He was awfully glad, he told Gertrude, awfully glad. Graham was a fine chap, and he was worthy of her, as he himself had never been. It was generous of her to have forgiven his presumption. Oh yes, it was! Well, all luck to her, and all happiness — to her and to the fortunate Graham!

"Do you know what I thought once?" he said.

"How can I possibly know what you thought once?" said Gertrude, with a grave smile.

"You won't mind!—I thought somehow it would eventually be Woodford. You remember Woodford? It was very ridiculous, of course."

"Yes, it was very ridiculous," said Gertrude.

Something in her manner prevented him from ever again alluding to what he had "thought once."

The county ball was approaching. Gertrude would fain have excused herself from going to it. She had not forgotten the tragedy of Brabant's life and death, and she was in no mood for dancing; but Lady Julia, near as it was to the time of her niece's wedding, had filled her house for the ball. It was one of the functions of the year, and Lady Julia, as a patroness and so on, felt it incumbent on her to be present. Gertrude pleaded the nearness of her marriage. Wilfrid himself was coming down, said Lady Julia. Gertrude's objections were overruled, and she said that she would go.

"Of course," said Lady Julia, shortly.

The day arrived. Graham was to arrive in the after-

noon, and Gertrude drove to meet him. By some miscalculation she found that the train had been in fully ten minutes when she reached Parkhurst. It happened, however, that Wilfrid Graham had not come by it. A telegram, of which a duplicate had been sent to Eastwood, awaited her at the station. He had missed his train. He would come down later, dress at the Sceptre, and thence go on to the ball.

Gertrude gave an exclamation of disappointment, and turned the horses' heads in the direction of home. Then it occurred to her that it would be well to leave a message at the hotel that a room might be ready for him. So she called there on her way.

There had evidently been the arrival of a guest at the Sceptre just before she drew up. Some luggage lay in the hall. From her high seat she could see a portmanteau, and there remained to her, after giving her directions, the impression of it, and of the letters "F. W.," which were painted upon it, and which were presumably the initials of its owner.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Gertrude drove away.

Those two letters, whatever they might signify, seemed to have burned themselves into her brain. She felt as a man who has gazed at the sun, and for a time can see only crimson circles—or, suiting the case more aptly—as one who has looked at the words of a cunningly devised advertisement till he sees somebody's soap written

in dazzling characters upon the wall, the ceiling, or blank sheet of paper.

Gertrude saw "F. W." between her and the sky. She saw the letters on the Town Hall, where all was bustle in preparation for the ball. She saw them on the roll of crimson cloth that lay on a step ready to be laid down. She remembered little of the drive back to Eastwood. She saw "F. W." on the hall door. She saw "F. W." on every picture in the drawing-room when she joined her aunt and the guests at tea-time. She was silent, absent. She ate nothing, and she put down her cup half full. She could scarcely have told what ailed her. Her hands were cold. She held them to the fire. A color that looked hectic showed itself in her cheeks. When she rose she caught sight of her eyes in a mirror. They seemed to have absorbed something of the glow of the blazing flames.

Lady Julia was in high good-humor. Had she not reason? Her plans were being carried out so satisfactorily. She presented a different face from that of the Lady Julia who a few months back had held herself conscience-striken during a thunder-storm of some severity.

Gertrude's restlessness increased. It had no definite cause, but it was very real, and she could not argue it away. She talked at dinner, but in a spasmodic way that showed that her heart was not in the conversation. She ate little. She asked for a tumbler and water and she drank thirstily.

The ladies left the table early. Lady Julia stayed behind in the hall to give some directions as to the carriages and hurried up to dress for the ball. The door of Gertrude's room was open, and Lady Julia

glanced in as she passed. Something in the attitude of her niece struck her. Gertrude, standing indolently at the hearth, looked into the fire. She was still wearing a black and sombre gown, in which she had appeared at dinner. The room was light with the many candles which the maid had lit. Lady Julia paused, and went back to the door.

"Come, Gertrude," she said; "you must make haste; you will keep us waiting."

Miss Maxwell shook her head.

"I sha'n't keep you waiting, Aunt Julia," she said.

"Well then, dear, ring for Roberts and get ready."

Gertrude did not stir. She was still looking into the fire.

"Do you hear?" said Lady Julia, a little impatiently. "If you do, I wish you would answer one."

"The fact is, Aunt Julia," said Gertrude, "I don't want to go to-night."

Lady Julia advanced a few steps into the room. She saw Gertrude's ball-dress lying on the bed. She saw the flowers that had been sent up from the hot-house. She looked in surprise at the dark-robed figure by the hearth.

"Aren't you well?" she said, at last.

"It isn't that," said Gertrude; "I am quite well. I would rather not go, that is all."

"But why?" said her aunt, blankly; "why, in the name of wonder?"

Gertrude realized that she had no definite reason.

"I would rather not," she said. "Why should I go? I am to be married in a week. Why not let me stay quiet these last few days?"

"My dear child, what nonsense—what ridiculous nonsense! What has your marrying to do with it? There, I have rung your bell. You must begin to dress at once. Why, of course you must come! Think of Wilfrid, who is coming down on purpose!"

"I am thinking of Wilfrid," said Gertrude, in a curious tone. Lady Julia remembered it afterwards, as, indeed, she remembered the whole of this incident. "You wish me to go, Aunt Julia?"

"Not only that," said Lady Julia, with a smile, "I insist upon it!"

"Very well," said Gertrude; "I will go."

Half an hour or so later the carriages were at the door. The men were hanging about the hall, and the girls appeared one by one. Henry, who was back at Eastwood, as each vision appeared upon the staircase, made remarks in an undertone to a friend whom he had brought down for the ball. The friend chuckled a good deal, so the remarks were presumably funny.

Lady Julia made her appearance presently — handsome, bejewelled, and *décolletée*.

Gertrude came down slowly, buttoning her gloves. Her white draperies trailed on the stairs. Henry made no comments at her expense. Her beauty struck him as it had never struck him before.

She was very silent during the drive. Her brother wondered what ailed her. In the darkness he could see her face and head outlined against the window. But he knew Gertrude too well to question her about her mood. Lights flashed along the road. The Vicarage girls rubbed the rattling glass of the fly from the King's Arms and peered forth as the Eastwood carriages over-

took and rolled by their humble conveyance. It was in vain that they urged their Jehu forward that they might attach themselves to Lady Julia and her party. When they reached the line they found themselves divided from them by a long string of vehicles.

A clock struck the half-hour after ten as the Eastwood people stepped out onto the crimson cloth. The Town Hall was as bright as light and flowers and palms could make it. A small crowd stood at each side of the door, and made comments as the guests filed up from their carriages into the building. Gertrude heard her name.

Lady Julia's silks swept by with an imposing rustle. Gertrude ascended the stairs languidly, looking about her with eyes that saw everything and noted nothing. Afterwards she had no very clear impression of the early part of the evening. Familiar faces greeted her at every step to the cloak-room. She exchanged words with her friends, and mechanically she looked into the glass, as others looked, to see that her hair had not been ruffled during the drive. She was dimly conscious of the absent expression her features wore as she followed her aunt to the ball-room.

With kaleidoscopic effect people and colors moved before her. Here and there a hunt coat made a spot of pink. A diamond flashed on a woman's neck. The gold of a bangle caught the light and threw out its gleam of yellow. The soft tints of girls' dresses wove themselves into a patternless patchwork that was always forming and never formed. It might have been Gertrude's fancy that in the swaying sea of faces she caught a momentary glimpse of one that made her heart to leap.

She felt dazed—she could not tell how much that was going on about her was real, and how much had its place only in her heated imagination. She was conscious of being surrounded by many people, of giving or refusing dances, but she could not have told to whom they were granted, and to whom denied. While she was speaking to the men who had gathered round her, she looked about the room nervously and with eyes restless, had she known it, as those of Brabant. The floor was vibrating with the measure of the dancers' feet, and the music seemed to pulse with her blood.

Henry was watching his sister. When an opportunity occurred, he approached her.

"Who are you looking for?" he said, with more of suddenness than grammar.

Gertrude started.

"I? Whom have I to look for? It is early still. I have been calculating, and I find that Wilfrid can't be here much before twelve."

"I wasn't thinking of Wilfrid," said Henry.

"Whom else?" said Gertrude, nervously.

"I have lived too much apart from you to know," said Henry.

Involuntarily Gertrude's eyes wandered away from him. He saw her scanning the moving faces.

"You look," said Henry, slowly, "as if you expected to see a ghost, and wished to see one, and yet were afraid. Has your past any ghosts, Gertrude?"

His sister laughed oddly.

"None," she said, "none. Nor if it had should I try to see them."

For her thoughts went suddenly to Brabant.

"Then dance, dear, and look happy. You have everything you can possibly wish for."

"Yes, I have everything I can wish for. I ought to look happy, oughtn't I? Wilfrid is the best and the dearest fellow in the world. I am to be married to him in a week. Oh, why did he miss his train? I wish he was here. I want him here. That is what is the matter with me, I think."

"Well, he will turn up before very long," said Henry, and he moved away.

Had he stayed, he would have seen his sister give a sudden gesture. He would have seen the color leave her face and a frozen look come over her lips. He might have gathered that in very truth she saw a spectre.

It was with a great effort that Gertrude recovered herself. That which she had dreaded had occurred, and she had met France Woodford again.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"I FOUND him at the Sceptre," Gertrude heard little Harwood saying to her, but his voice sounded very distant, and she could not see the speaker for the mist that had come before her eyes. "Fancy, the Sceptre, when half the houses about here would have been open to him!—and so I carried him off to Harwood with me, you bet, and I made him come here to-night."

Gertrude was conscious of putting out her hand.

"And the Manor is closed, isn't it?" she said, in as

steady a voice as she could command. "Mrs. Woodford is still away?"

To her great relief, Harwood chattered on, and Gertrude looked at him as if her life depended upon missing one of his trifling utterances. All the time she was conscious that Woodford's eyes were upon her own. She felt their steadfast scrutiny as a thing tangible. With the first sound of his voice in greeting, her pulses had leaped. After a time the strain became unendurable, and she was forced to look at him. He was little changed. Every memory that she had hoped slept awoke.

"You haven't forgotten me?" he was saying. "You will give me a dance, Miss Maxwell?"

"Yes, I must give you a dance," Gertrude answered, vaguely; "I must give you a dance for—the sake of old times. But you are late. I am afraid I have only a choice of one to offer you."

France moved nearer to her. Harwood was speaking to some one else.

"The last was the first I danced," Woodford said, in a low voice, "and I had to dance that. I had been watching the door since I arrived till then."

"Watching the door?" said Gertrude, without any very clear notion of what she was saying.

"Because I knew your card would fill up at once—and by dancing that one dance I missed what I had waited for."

Gertrude looked at him in a bewildered way. He met her eyes steadily, and looked into them deeply. There was a pause. Harwood turned from his friend.

"And am I not to have a dance?" he said.

"I am afraid not," said Gertrude; "you are so late. I am very sorry."

Simultaneously the two men noted upon Gertrude's card three blank spaces, besides that which France was about to fill up with his own name.

"But those," said Harwood—"those. You can give me one—unless—oh yes, I know. All right. I understand."

France looked from one to the other, and Gertrude took back her card in silence.

Lady Julia, in happy unconsciousness of any dangerous presence at the ball, moved about importantly among the elect. More than once Gertrude looked in her direction and hesitated. Even now it might be well to leave Parkhurst. But he or she who hesitates is lost, and Gertrude hesitated. The minutes passed. Gertrude could not have told how they were spent until the hands of the clock pointed to a quarter to twelve. Then a waltz was coming to an end, and the next was the dance she had promised to France. Again she looked desperately at the spot where her aunt had been standing. The doors of the supper-room had been thrown open. She saw Lady Julia disappearing through them on the arm of a county magnate. Wilfrid had not arrived. She tried to persuade herself that circumstances were against her.

"I am frightened," she was saying to herself; "I am frightened."

When the interval was over, France lost no time in coming to find her.

"Shall we dance?"

"Yes," said Gertrude; "yes."

The opening of the supper-room had somewhat eased tha ball-room. Gertrude and France took a few steps upon a clear floor. They moved as one person. Quite suddenly they exchanged glances. The air of the dance had declared itself.

"Bruff's ranch song," said France, below his breath.

"I did not know it had been set as a waltz," Gertrude tried to say, but her voice failed her.

France bent to catch the words.

"What? I can't hear you!" he said.

Ever so slightly he tightened his hold of her hand. The movement may have been unconscious. His face as he danced was close to hers. She began to tremble so violently that he stopped and led her quickly out of the ball-room and on to the veranda above the porch. The place, which happened to be empty, had been roofed in, and was hung with draperies. She lay back in the chair to which he led her. A weakness which disabled her caused her eyes to close. When she opened them he was bending anxiously above her. Then these two looked at each other for a long time in silence, and presently Gertrude realized that France was holding her hand. She tried to draw it away, but he gently thwarted her, and took it more closely into his own. The warmth of his palm seemed to give her life. Again he looked deeply into her eyes; she allowed hers to meet his steadily. A few moments passed thus, and then with sudden misgiving, Gertrude knew what she had done. She thought of Wilfrid, and she shrank back. He followed her movement, bending more forward.

"Oh," said Gertrude, breathlessly; "you mustn't hold my hand! You—you must forget all this. We must

both forget it. I am ashamed. You must go, please; you must go—indeed you must! I must be mad, I think, or wicked. Oh, I am wicked. You must go!"

"You won't send me away — again?" whispered France. "I have come thousands of miles to see you. You won't send me away—you can't send me away as you did before—"

"As I did before?" said Gertrude. Each word came separately from her lips. "As I did before?—when? What do you mean?"

"Ah, what matter now?" said France. "What does anything matter now? Oh, you owe me some reparation for my months of banishment!"

"Your months of banishment?" said Gertrude.

She put her hand to her forehead, and pushed back her hair.

"It seemed cruel—then," said France.

Gertrude raised herself suddenly.

"What seemed cruel?" she asked.

France smiled.

"I see it differently now," he said, gently. "I know that Lady Julia was right, and that though you might have deceived yourself into thinking it possible to marry a poor man—"

Gertrude interrupted him. Her eyes were wide and tragic.

"I don't understand a word you are saying," she said, with amazement. "I don't know whether I am dreaming or not. I don't know what you are talking about. You speak of banishment! You say I sent you away! I—*I?* Do you know yourself what you are saying?"

It was his turn for bewilderment.

"What don't you understand?" he asked.

He had risen to his feet, and now Gertrude rose also. They faced each other. The music of the dance came to them faintly.

"I understand nothing," said Gertrude. "You say I sent you away."

"Did you not?" said France, quickly. "It is true that Lady Julia was spokeswoman, but she had your authority for what she said—or at least your concurrence in it."

Gertrude gave a gesture indicative of her hopeless inability to understand.

"You or I are dreaming," she said, with an attempt at a smile. "Are you, then, at all? Will you tell me whether you are France Woodford, and whether you are speaking to me, Gertrude Maxwell? Let us be sure of our identity, at least."

"But what is there that you don't understand?" said France again. "Isn't it all simple enough? My God! I don't forget! Did not Lady Julia write to me and arrange an interview? Did she not then tell me plainly that if I was thinking of asking you to marry me, it was out of the question? Did she not tell me that she had talked the matter over with you—that it was true that you liked me, but that you were not prepared to accept such a lot as it would have been in my power to offer you? Did she not say that if I stayed on here it would only cause a great deal of unhappiness to you? Ah, you were selfish! You thought only of yourself."

Gertrude had been pale before. Now, as she listened, an indescribable whiteness came over her face. More than once she tried to speak. When at last any words came from her lips they were scarcely audible.

"Aunt Julia told you a lie!"

"What?"

"I haven't heard a word of all this till now."

"Do you mean that you did not know why I went?—that she had not told you?—that you had not told her? Gertrude, Gertrude! is it I that am dreaming?"

"We are both awake," said Gertrude. "We are both awake at last! Oh! did you believe it? Did you believe it? Could you believe it—of me? Oh! you should have known me better than to have thought that of me!"

Tears sprang to her eyes.

"If you had asked me to marry you and live in a hovel, I would have married you."

He was holding her hand once more.

"That Aunt Julia should have dared?" she said, presently; "that she should have dared to speak for me—to use my name! Are you certain there is no mistake—are you certain? It was horrible—it was heinous—"

She stopped, realizing the complete impotence of words to express her indignation and her righteous anger.

"It was damnable!" said France, shortly; "it was dishonorable!"

They stood still for a few moments. All thought of Wilfrid had been swept from Gertrude's mind by the stupendous import of the revelation that had been made to her. The dance had come to an end. Voices sounded in the corridors, but no one came to disturb the two beings who faced each other and a crisis in their lives.

"If you did not know this," said France, presently, "what must you have thought of my going? Do you

know that I went to Eastwood that night—the night, I mean, of the day on which I lunched with you? I went just to be near you, and I saw you at your window—"

"The rose!" said Gertrude, suddenly. "The rose I gave you! You returned it to me—oh, you didn't care!"

"Oh," said France, "I hunted for that flower high and low. I lost it that night."

"But you put it in my book," said Gertrude; "you put it in my book!"

A look of enlightenment came over his face.

"That accounts for it, then. I remember picking up the rose, which I substituted for the one I took. I must have dropped my own."

Gertrude was silent. How simple was the true explanation of that which had seemed capable of but one dire interpretation.

The mention of the rose recalled to Gertrude its recent destruction, and this, in turn, reminded her of—Wilfrid. Woodford saw the appalled expression of her eyes.

"France," she said, in a tone of horror, "an awful thing has happened to us both."

"Oh, what does it all matter now?" said Woodford again; "we can defy Lady Julia. It is no longer a hovel that I have to offer you. We spoke of Bruff just now—poor Bruff!—it is indirectly through him that I find myself in a position to ask you to marry me. Mrs. Essex died the other day, and to my amazement I found she had left me everything. I have travelled day and night to come to you."

Gertrude made no sign of surprise or joy.

"It is too late," she said. "Oh! how can I tell you? France, you went away. You left me. You said nothing to let me know that you cared for me. I am engaged to some one else. I am to be married in a week."

The silence that ensued seemed to Gertrude as if it would never end. France and she looked each in the other's face. He moved nearer to her.

"But you love me," he said.

She did not speak.

"You love me!" he said again; "you love me—me!"

"I have always loved you," she said, at last.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE situation was desperate, but so also was Gertrude. She viewed her case rapidly, and the case of France—the case even of Wilfrid; then, with the resolution of which she was capable, she made up her mind. Her purpose was steadfast.

Graham, having eaten a hasty meal at the Sceptre and made his way to the Town Hall, found Gertrude watching for him.

For a moment her heart misgave her as she saw the smile of greeting which came over his face as he saw her, and hurried up the stairs.

"Oh, Gertrude, how much of this night I have missed!" he said. "The rest of your programme is for me, I hope. It was very rough luck missing the train. However, here I am at last. Now, let me begin to en-

joy myself. The next is mine, isn't it?—and the next, and the next, and the next?"

He stopped. Gertrude was looking at him through tears. He saw by this and a sudden catching of her breath that something was amiss. France had stepped back, and he was looking at Graham curiously.

"Are you ill, Gertrude?"

"No; but I want you to take me home at once. I have something to say to you."

"But Lady Julia—" began Wilfrid.

"Never mind Aunt Julia," said Gertrude. "I can't see her yet. I want to go, Wilfrid. I must go. Don't you see I am in earnest? You must take me at once, and Aunt Julia can follow when she likes. I shall be ready for her. I am going to get my cloak. Send for a carriage. It can come back. I am not mad, Wilfrid. Oh, I will tell you, but I cannot here—you will know soon enough! Don't look at me as if I had lost my senses. I want to go, Wilfrid, at once — at once — at once."

Graham obeyed her mechanically. He saw her hurry into the cloak-room past the people who were coming from the ball-room. The fly which had brought him from the Sceptre was still at the door. The night was young, and the Eastwood carriages would not be round for another two hours. He saw Gertrude, like Cinderella, running down the stairs. He followed her into the vehicle, having told the coachman to drive to Eastwood. Gertrude, with chattering teeth, lay back in her corner.

"You are ill, Gertrude. You must be ill."

She shook her head.

He still thought that she was ill. He put his hand upon her forehead gently. Her temples were hot and throbbing, as he had expected.

"Dear Gertrude," he said, "your head is aching. It will be better presently. Poor old Gertrude, did you wait to see me? You ought to have left sooner. Lean against my shoulder—there, like that. Is that comfortable? I wish I could do anything for you. Is my hand cool—does it relieve you?"

His words, his tone, his thought for her were as stabs. She burst into a paroxysm of weeping. She bowed her head over his hand and kissed it. She held it convulsively to her. Her tears fell upon it.

"My poor Gertrude!" he whispered, "my darling Gertrude!"

Every word that he said made it harder for her to tell him. What better could she desire than the love of this man?

"You ought to be in bed," he said, gently. "They oughtn't to have let you come to this ball."

It was then first that Gertrude found her voice.

"I didn't want to come," she said, between her sobs. "I didn't want to come. Aunt Julia can tell you. I didn't want to come. I knew something would happen. I knew it. I can't explain, but I did know, and I didn't want to be tempted. Oh, Wilfrid! Wilfrid! Wilfrid! how unhappy I am! I am not ill, as you think. I am not ill. Don't you see that it isn't that?"

"What is it then?" said Graham. He spoke very quietly.

"How shall I tell you?" said Gertrude, brokenly. She buried her face in her hands, and she did not see his

look of apprehension deepen to one of certain knowledge.

There was a long pause before either spoke. Then Wilfrid said, in a low voice:

"Has he come back, Gertrude?"

She did not answer immediately, but shrank into the deeper shadow of her corner of the carriage. Wilfrid said nothing further just then. He looked out of the window. The night was frosty. White hedges and white trees and white fields were being passed. The horse's hoofs made a sharp sound upon the hard road.

"What do you want me to do?" he said, at last. "He has come late in the day, Gertrude. It is nearly the eleventh hour."

Still Gertrude did not answer.

"So you have never cared for me," Wilfrid said, presently—"not even in these last weeks, when I have been thinking that you were beginning to be fond of me. I came across a line, an Indian proverb, to-night, in a book I was reading in the train—'I am dying for you, and you are dying for another.'"

The window fell, and he leaned across her and put it up. She caught his hand.

"It is better to tell you, isn't it," she said, struggling to master her voice. "I—I told you in the beginning that I wanted to be honest with you. You won't believe now that I care for you. How can I expect you to believe it? I am torn in two directions. Oh, try to understand! I told you everything when you first asked me to marry you. I told you I cared for some one else. I told you I was unhappy. I told you he did not care for me—he had gone away. But I didn't know what I

know now. He did care for me, and Aunt Julia sent him away—"

She broke off with a sob. She was still holding Wilfrid's hand. She could not trust herself to look at him and see how great a change had come over the face that was by nature merry and boyish.

"Aunt Julia sent him away because he was poor, and she told him the lie that has caused all this misery. She dared to say that I wished him to go—I, who would have gone through anything for him."

Wilfrid pressed gently the hands that held his hand.

"My poor Gertrude!"

"You can speak kindly to me! Oh, Wilfrid!"

It was some time after this before she could sufficiently control herself to tell him the rest of the story. She did not look at him, but she knew that he winced, and her heart bled for him.

"What do you wish of me?" he said, in the end.

"Wilfrid, as God hears me, I care for you. I would have been a faithful wife to you, and I would have loved you. I love you now—if it be possible to love two—but he was first. Oh, my dear, dear Wilfrid, forgive me! I didn't want to go to-night. I had a presentiment that I should meet him. Of course, I saw those letters on the luggage, but I had felt what I mean before that. I have been frightened. Oh, how can I explain? I have dreaded meeting him again, because I knew it would unsettle me, and then I did not know what I know now."

"You want me to give you your freedom, Gertrude? You are free."

The words brought her no joy.

"I think I will marry neither of you," she said, hopelessly.

"And break three hearts, as you would do if you were in a book or a play?" He made an attempt at a laugh. There were tears in his eyes. "No, dear; be thankful that he came back in time. Next week he would have been too late. Next week, oh, my God! Gertrude, next week!"

"Wilfrid! Wilfrid!" cried Gertrude. She threw her arms round his neck. She held her face against his. Their tears were mingled.

"I can't let you go," she said; "I can't let you go. Perhaps now I love you best. How do I know?"

But the cab took Wilfrid back to the Sceptre, and Gertrude sat up for Lady Julia.

THE END.

STANDARD NOVELS IN PAPER COVERS.

CHARLES DICKENS.

		PRICE
ver Twist (illustrated)	8vo	$0 50
rtin Chuzzlewit (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
Curiosity Shop (ill'd)	8vo	75
vid Copperfield (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
mbey and Son (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
holas Nickleby (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
ak House (illustrated)	8vo	1 00
kwick Papers (illustrated)	8vo	1 00
tle Dorrit (illustrated)	8vo	1 00
rnaby Rudge (illustrated)	8vo	1 00
ale of Two Cities (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
r Mutual Friend (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
ristmas Stories (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
at Expectations (ill'd)	8vo	1 00
e Uncommercial Traveller, Hard Times, and Edwin Drood (illustrated	8vo	1 00
tures from Italy, Sketches by Boz, and American Notes (illustrated)	8vo	1 00
kwick Papers	4to	20
e Mudfog Papers	4to	10
stery of Edwin Drood (ill'd)	8vo	25
rd Times	8vo	25
s. Lirriper's Legacy	8vo	10

EDWARD BULWER.

Strange Story (illustrated)	8vo	50
vereux	8vo	40
dolphin	8vo	35
nelm Chillingly	8vo	50
ila	8vo	25
ght and Morning	8vo	50
usanias the Spartan	8vo	25
e Coming Race	12mo	50
e Last Days of Pompeii	8vo	25
e Parisians (illustrated)	8vo	60
e Pilgrims of the Rhine	8vo	20
noni	8vo	35
e Rightful Heir	16mo	15

WILKIE COLLINS.

madale (illustrated)	8vo	60
tonina	8vo	40
Say No"	16mo	35
	4to	20
n and Wife	4to	20
r Lady's Money	32mo	25
Name (ill'd by M'Lenan)	8vo	60
rcy and the Prophet	32mo	20
or Miss Finch (illustrated)	8vo	60
e Evil Genius	12mo	25
e Ghost's Touch	12mo	25
e Guilty River	12mo	25
e Law and the Lady (ill'd)	8vo	50
e Two Destinies (ill'd)	8vo	35

R. D. BLACKMORE.

ristowell	4to	20
ra Vaughan	4to	15
adock Nowell	8vo	60
ema	8vo	50
t and Kitty	8vo	35
rna Doone (illustrated)	8vo	40
id of Sker	8vo	50
ry Anerley	4to	15
ringhaven (illustrated)	4to	25
mmy Upmore	16mo	35
	4to	20

VICTOR HUGO.

nety-Three	8vo	25
ilers of the Sea	8vo	50
story of a Crime	4to	10

CHARLES READE.

		PRICE
A Perilous Secret	12mo	$0 40
	4to	20
Singleheart and Doubleface, &c. (illustrated)	4to	15
A Hero and a Martyr	8vo	15
A Simpleton	8vo	35
A Woman-Hater (illustrated)	8vo	30
	12mo	25
Good Stories (illustrated)	12mo	50
"	4to	20
It is Never Too Late to Mend	8vo	35
Foul Play	8vo	30
White Lies	8vo	30
Peg Woffington, and Other Tales	8vo	35
Put Yourself in His Place (illustrated)	8vo	35
A Terrible Temptation (ill'd)	8vo	25
The Jilt (illustrated)	32mo	20
The Coming Man	32mo	20
The Picture	16mo	15
Jack of All Trades	16mo	15

GEORGE ELIOT.

Felix Holt	8vo	50
Middlemarch	8vo	75
Daniel Deronda	8vo	50
Romola (illustrated)	8vo	50
Scenes of Clerical Life	8vo	50
Silas Marner	12mo	25
Adam Bede	4to	25
Impressions of Theo. Such	4to	10
Amos Barton	32mo	20
Mr. Gilfil's Love Story	32mo	20
Janet's Repentance	32mo	20
Brother Jacob.—The Lifted Veil	32mo	20

WILLIAM BLACK.

An Adventure in Thule	4to	10
A Daughter of Heth	8vo	35
A Princess of Thule	8vo	50
Donald Ross of Heimra	8vo	50
Green Pastures and Piccadilly	8vo	50
In Far Lochaber	8vo	40
In Silk Attire	8vo	35
Judith Shakespeare	4to	20
Kilmeny	8vo	35
Macleod of Dare (illustrated)	8vo	60
	4to	15
Madcap Violet	8vo	50
Monarch of Mincing Lane (illustrated)	8vo	50
Prince Fortunatus (illustrated)	8vo	50
Sabina Zembra	4to	20
Strange Adv's of a Phaeton	8vo	50
Strange Adventures of a House-boat (illustrated)	8vo	50
Sunrise	4to	20
That Beautiful Wretch (ill'd)	4to	20
The Maid of Killeena, &c.	8vo	40
Three Feathers (illustrated)	8vo	50
White Heather	4to	20
White Wings	4to	20

H. RIDER HAGGARD.

She (illustrated), 4to, 25 cts.; 16mo		25
King Solomon's Mines	4to	20
Jess	4to	15
Allan Quatermain (ill'd)	16mo	25
Mr. Meeson's Will	16mo	25
Maiwa's Revenge (ill'd)	16mo	25
Col. Quaritch, V.C. (ill'd)	16mo	25
Cleopatra (illustrated)	16mo	25
Beatrice (illustrated)	16mo	30
The World's Desire	16mo	35

WILLIAM M. THACKERAY.

		PRICE
Henry Esmond and Lovel the Widower (illustrated)	8vo	$0 60
Denis Duval (illustrated)	8vo	25
Great Hoggarty Diamond	8vo	20
Henry Esmond	8vo	50
Lovel the Widower	8vo	20
Vanity Fair (illustrated)	8vo	80
Pendennis (illustrated)	8vo	75
The Virginians (illlustrated)	8vo	90
The Newcomes (illustrated)	8vo	90

WALTER BESANT.

Uncle Jack and Other Stories	12mo	25
All in a Garden Fair	4to	20
Self or Bearer	4to	15
For Faith and Freedom	8vo	50
The Bell of St. Paul's	8vo	35
The Inner House	8vo	30
The World Went Very Well Then (illustrated)	4to	25
The Children of Gibeon	4to	20
The Holy Rose	4to	20
Katherine Regina	4to	15
Dorothy Forster	4to	20
To Call Her Mine (illustrated)	4to	20
Herr Paulus	8vo	35
Armorel of Lyonesse (ill'd)	8vo	50
All Sorts and Conditions of Men (illustrated)	8vo	50
St. Katherine's by the Tower (illustrated)	8vo	60

BESANT & RICE.

Golden Butterfly	8vo	40
When the Ship Comes Home	32mo	25
'Twas in Trafalgar's Bay	32mo	20
Sweet Nelly	4to	10
Shepherds All and Maidens Fair	32mo	25
The Chaplain of the Fleet	4to	20
By Celia's Arbor (illustrated)	8vo	50
The Captain's Room	4to	10
So They Were Married (ill'd)	4to	20

W. CLARK RUSSELL.

Auld Lang Syne	4to	10
A Sailor's Sweetheart	4to	15
A Sea Queen	4to	20
A Strange Voyage	4to	20
A Book for the Hammock	4to	20
Wreck of the "Grosvenor"	8vo	30
An Ocean Free-Lance	4to	20
An Ocean Tragedy	8vo	50
The "Lady Maud" (illustrated)	4to	20
Marooned	8vo	25
My Danish Sweetheart (ill'd)	8vo	60
My Shipmate Louise	8vo	50
My Watch Below	4to	20
In the Middle Watch	12mo	25
Little Loo	4to	20
On the Fo'k'sle Head	4to	15
Voyage to the Cape	12mo	25
Round the Galley Fire	4to	15
The Golden Hope	4to	20
Jack's Courtship	4to	25
John Holdsworth, Chief Mate	4to	20
The Frozen Pirate (illustrated)	4to	25

THOMAS HARDY.

A Group of Noble Dames (illustrated)	8vo	75
Romantic Adventures of a Milk-Maid	4to	10
The Woodlanders	4to	20
Fellow-Townsmen	32mo	20
A Laodicean (illustrated)	4to	20
Wessex Tales	8vo	30

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK.

☞ *Any of the above works sent by mail, postage prepaid, to any part of the United States, Canada, or Mexico, on receipt of the price.*

The Best for Family Reading.

NO publishing house has yet succeeded in ministering, as the Harpers do, through their periodicals, to old and young, men and women seekers for current news graphically illustrated scholars, travellers, and artists, and children of all ages.—*Observer*, N. Y.

Harper's Magazine.

Issued Monthly. $4 00 Year.

Its history is a large part of the literary history of the nineteenth century in America—N. Y. Journal of Commerce.

Harper's Weekly.

Issued Weekly. $4 00 a Year.

The only illustrated paper of the day that, in its essential characteristics, is recognized as a national paper.—Brooklyn Eagle.

Harper's Bazar.

Issued Weekly. $4 00 a Year.

To take it is a matter of economy. No one can afford to be without it.—Chicago Evening Journal.

Harper's Young People.

Issued Weekly. $2 00 a Year.

HARPER'S YOUNG PEOPLE *contains a marvellous amount of healthful and interesting reading for young people of all ages and both sexes.*—Boston Journal.

Booksellers and Postmasters usually receive Subscriptions. Subscriptions sent direct to the Publishers should be accompanied by Post-office Money Order or Draft. When no time is specified, Subscriptions will begin with the current Number. Postage FREE in the United States, Canada, or Mexico.

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW YORK.

576 .8 i

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing Agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date:
JAN 1997
BOOKKEEPER
PRESERVATION TECHNOLOGIES, INC.
111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Twp., PA 16066
(412) 779-2111

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

00021658157